

Takoma Park's sanctuary status challenged in legislature

BY CLARE BOYLE

Takoma Park's status as a "sanctuary city" is under a mild threat from a proposal to withhold state funding from localities with sanctuary policies. A bill by Del. Warren E. Miller, a Republican from Woodbine, is under consideration in the Maryland General Assembly to prohibit sanctuary policies and to require "local governments to enforce federal immigration law."

The proposed bill would require all cities within Maryland to comply with federal laws, essentially prohibiting sanctuary

cities throughout the state. The goal of the bill is to "remove the incentive for illegal immigration," Miller said.

Takoma Park Mayor Bruce Williams, who testified against the bill in March, does not seem worried. "I think the bill's going nowhere," he said.

Takoma Park's 1985 sanctuary law is similar to laws in other municipalities nationwide. It prohibits city police or employees from enforcing federal immigration laws or collecting and disclosing information regarding immigration status.

"We're not required to do the federal government's job," Williams said. "Our job is to make our community as welcoming as possible and as diverse as possible."

Ward 3 Councilmember Dan Robinson agreed. "We do pride ourselves on being a sanctuary city, and have for a long time," he said.

Miller's bill is not unique. A record

30-plus bills aimed at illegal immigrants have been introduced in the legislature this session. Supporters are rallying and are far more organized than in the past.

Kim Propeack, advocacy director for CASA of Maryland, a nonprofit group for immigrant rights founded in 1985, believes that the rise in anti-immigrant sentiment is because "people have grown increasingly frustrated by a lack of action on a congressional level."

Propeack said that she does not believe that any of these bills will gain footing, but the trend is bothersome. "Some of the language in these bills is pretty egregious," she added.

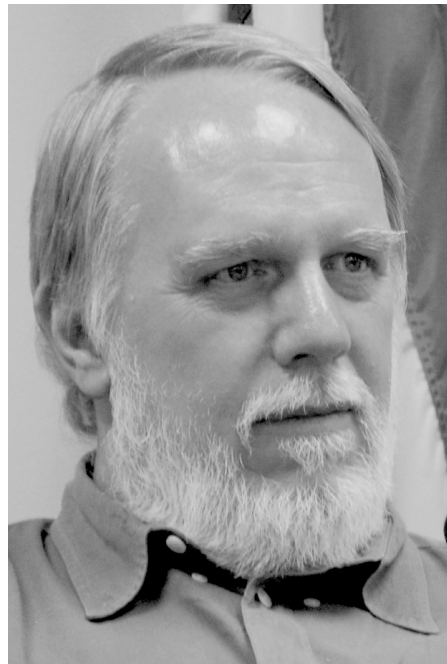
Part of CASA's mission is to keep anti-immigrant legislation off the books and to protect sanctuary status in cities. "We've tried to coordinate closely with the officials in Takoma Park to make sure it isn't affected," Propeack said.

The proposed legislation from Miller and others comes only five months after the Takoma Park City Council reaffirmed and strengthened its sanctuary ordinance.

But the council was forced to amend the city's sanctuary law in January to comply with two other laws: a state requirement that all law enforcement officers be documented U.S. citizens and eligible to work in the country, and a federal law that states that an individual must prove immigration status when applying for a passport—a service that is available at the Takoma Park Community Center.

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—Takoma Park Mayor Bruce Williams**

Join the mayor's kitchen cabinet Bruce Williams hosts free breakfast at Dunkin' Donuts on April 19



Takoma Park Mayor Bruce Williams

BY NADIAH RODRIGUEZ

Keeping up Takoma Park's tradition of open access to elected officials, recently elected city mayor Bruce Williams will host a meet-and-greet on Saturday, April 19.

Residents of Takoma Park and any other interested citizens will have the opportunity to mingle with Williams from 10:30 a.m. to 12:30 p.m. at the Dunkin' Donuts/Baskin Robbins at 6851 New Hampshire Avenue. The meet-and-

greet will be held over a complimentary breakfast, including coffee and various baked goods, which will be available to participants from 10 a.m. to 1 p.m.

Organizers of the event said that they spent nearly two months planning, and that the gathering is intended to show appreciation to the supportive and loyal citizens of Takoma Park as well as provide an informal atmosphere for discussion.

Franchisee Sameer Ailawadi, owner of the New Hampshire Avenue store and another on University Boulevard, came up with the idea. He said that after attending several Takoma Park town meetings, he had planned to do something to involve the community around the store's one-year anniversary, which was on February 28.

"I thought this would be a great opportunity for me to meet the residents of Takoma Park and neighboring communities and to get to know them, and also for them to meet with the mayor," Ailawadi said. "Many of them haven't met the mayor personally. This is an opportunity for them to chat with the mayor about anything they have on their minds."

"I look forward to meeting with my fellow residents at one of our community's thriving businesses," said Williams. "I encourage everyone to come by for a fun time."

For more information, call Dunkin' Donuts/Baskin Robbins at 301-270-2445.

Big Brother focuses in on Takoma Park

Speed cameras to be installed on New Hampshire Avenue and Ethan Allan Avenue

BY NADIAH RODRIGUEZ

Takoma Park will join Montgomery County's Safe Speed program and install speed cameras at the city locations found to have the most speeding infractions. At its March 23 worksession, the Takoma Park City Council gave preliminary approval to a speed camera program.

The program was first proposed at the April 9, 2007 Takoma Park City Council meeting.

"I didn't think we had a speed problem or needed cameras," said Takoma Park Police Chief Ronald Ricucci. "But Mayor [Kathy] Porter asked me to look into it."

The police department then entered into a memorandum of understanding with ACS State and Local Solutions to investigate and document speeding around the city. In August and September of last year, the police department and ACS conducted a four-day traffic survey of 13 high-risk areas

near the city's six schools. After the survey results were reviewed and compared, the University Boulevard, New Hampshire Avenue, Ethan Allen Avenue, and Takoma Avenue were identified as the locations with the highest violation percentages.

Ultimately, officials recommended two locations: the 7400 block of New Hampshire Avenue and the 500 block of Ethan Allen — where the most drivers are in violation of the posted speed limit of 25 mph. Those recommendations were not embraced completely by the council, however, according to Ward 4 Councilmember Terry Seamens.

"The cameras received unanimous but not enthusiastic support," Seamens said. "I'm not sure I want to see a speed camera on every street."

Also, the March 23 council agenda states that the proposed budget must be reassessed in order to determine the cost of camera program to the city.

Montgomery County Safe Speed is the first county program of its kind in Maryland. The program focuses on pedestrian and motorist safety in residential areas and school zones. Drivers who are caught speeding at least 10 mph over the 35 mph posted speed limit are penalized with a \$40 fine.

The Montgomery County Safe Speed web page states that the cameras operate by assessing the speed of each passing vehicle. Those traveling over the enforced limit "will be the subject of a series of photographs taken to document the violation." A citation, including a photograph of the license plate and the recorded speed, is sent to the owner of vehicle.

The county web site states that once the cameras are in place in Takoma Park, it will be the fourth city in Montgomery County to adopt the Safe Speed program. The others include Chevy Chase Village, the city of

Rockville, and the city of Gaithersburg.

Takoma Park is expected to use fixed cameras (mounted on posts or traffic lights). They will be moved to more suitable areas if necessary.

According to Ricucci, the main advantage of using fixed cameras rather than mobile (vehicle-based) cameras is the reduction in employee time needed. Mobile cameras would require an increase in full-time employees to drive the vehicle that houses the speed camera. Fixed cameras would merely need part-time analysts to process the data.

Some Takoma Park residents have expressed skepticism over the effectiveness of speed cameras.

"I think they're a waste of money," said Euclid Gomez, a chief building engineer in Takoma Park. "They are good at first because they catch a couple people for a while. But then people learn where [the cameras] are, and just slow down and speed off."