



November 7, 2017

Dear Mayor Stewart:

Please accept this letter into the record of proceedings related to the redevelopment of the City parking lot at the Takoma Junction. We have had time to reflect on the Council's comments during the last public hearing. The Council held that hearing, and crafted its Resolution, in order to help inform the new Council in connection with this matter. We realize that some elected officials, like yourself, are very familiar with the Co-op because you have been a Takoma Park resident – and a Co-op member – for many years. Others in our community have little, if any, familiarity with who we are. In the spirit of your last hearing, this letter is intended to provide for the record a more complete picture of the Co-op. Because of the nature of the development proceedings, we have been considered largely in the context of our operational needs (e.g., parking, deliveries, trash removal), and think it is important for everyone who considers the development project to understand the Co-op in a broader context.

The Co-op is community owned, which explains in part why so many people who live here feel it embodies the essence of Takoma Park. It makes it unique among other grocery stores in our area. Anyone can become a member, and every member is an owner. Today we have nearly 10,000 members, which means nearly 10,000 people have an ownership interest in this grocery store, and our impact extends beyond the individual member as the whole household shops with that membership. We are not a charity or non-profit organization. We pay taxes and we use our profits for the good of the community in what we call our Triple Bottom Line:

- As a business serving Takoma Park residents, we constantly reinvest our profits to benefit our members, our staff and the broader community.
- We are careful to invest in products and services that protect and nurture the planet and our immediate area: sustainable and organic food and products from local producers, whenever possible. We are not a global corporation like Whole Foods or Wal-Mart. We're smart-sized, local and community owned.
- Like any smart business, we invest in new products and equipment that enable us to do a better job of serving our customers – a new cooler or shopping carts one month, a new product line the next.

Nearly 10,000 households mostly from Takoma Park and nearby D.C. have paid \$100 apiece to become member-owners of our co-op. We have been growing lately at a net rate of about 500 new households a year. Unlike the big supermarkets, no hedge funds or foreign conglomerates are involved in TPSS. Each shareholder gets one vote electing our local board of directors. They also get discounts when they shop. You don't have to be a member to shop at TPSS, of course, but in joining, one makes a statement of support for who we are and what we do in Takoma Park and Montgomery County.

We are first and foremost a co-op store that provides fresh produce, organic food and bakery goods, dairy and meat items, and wellness and personal care products. Since 2015 we've been licensed to sell beer and wine for offsite use. We are proud to support nearby producers and have done so for many years, long before it became fashionable. Currently we carry hundreds of products from 110 local suppliers, businesses such as Harrisburg Dairies, Simply Sausage, Licking Creek Farms, Peabody Heights Brewery, and Bete Ethiopian. Our members have told us it's important to them



that we carry local products. We assume it is important to the members for the same reasons it's important to us; we are supporting neighboring enterprises, we know who is making our food, and the products meet our needs.

We also bring the community together in non-commercial ways. For example, our Poker Chip program allows shoppers to donate the credits we offer for those who bring their own shopping bags to donate to local groups like the Humane Society, the Takoma Park Volunteer Fire Department, Manna Food Center and Eco City Farms. Last year we contributed \$3,177 to these sorts of groups from the Poker Chip program.

Similarly, our Pay It Forward program makes it easy for shoppers to contribute to feeding hungry families in our community. This past year \$1,394 was donated in food items to the Manna Food Center at Silver Spring United Methodist Church. When the hurricanes this fall hit so many people, we created local Round Up opportunities so that shoppers could round their purchases up to the nearest dollar and contribute to hurricane relief in Texas (\$4,135) and Puerto Rico (\$960). Each year we host and support Earth Day in Takoma Park by providing funds, food and equipment. And each year we donate thousands of dollars of food to organizations that are part of our community such as the Adventist Community Services of Greater Washington.

With 43 employees as I write, we are one of the City of Takoma Park's top 20 employers. Our staff is, by design, multi-cultural, representing 21 nationalities and a wide array of languages. That may be why so many immigrant residents of our community shop with us. We provide **full health care coverage** to all employees who work over 30 hours per week while also funding their Health Reimbursement Account to pay up to \$4,000 for out-of-pocket care.

And yes, we pay taxes to our city, as well as to the state of Maryland and the federal government. For fiscal year 2016-2017 we paid \$190,549 in federal income tax and \$50,394 in Maryland income tax, \$121,914 in employment taxes, plus \$16,504 in real property taxes and \$18,680 in personal business assessments. We pay the City of Takoma Park an additional \$21,986 to lease access to the city-owned Takoma Junction property next door to enable suppliers to make deliveries to our store, to house our trash and recycling containers, and to provide our customers and employees an additional 16 parking spaces to supplement our own off-street parking lot.

We are proud of our history and our engagement in the community where many of our members live and work. We welcome the continuing support and commitment we have enjoyed from the City government, and look forward to working together for many years to sustain a uniquely wonderful and prosperous Takoma Park.

Sincerely,

Martha Whitman
General Manager