

## **Statement by Arlington County Civic Federation in Reply to Statement by Arlington County Manager Mark Schwartz concerning the Level of Service measures at the Civic Federation Meeting of Jan. 8, 2019**

The Board of Directors of the Arlington County Civic Federation seeks to clarify our position concerning comments made in the [County Manager's Statement](#) concerning the actions of the Civic Federation released on January 28th.

It is important to emphasize that our Federation is a non-partisan membership organization comprised of over 80 community organizations. We endeavor to provide a neutral forum for our members to learn about, discuss, and at times, debate and pass resolutions, regarding issues of import to the Arlington community. Whenever practical, we try to structure those discussions, often through panels, to represent a variety of viewpoints on the issues. With limited meeting time, and with an emphasis on addressing resolutions on important issues proposed by our delegates, we cannot always accommodate requests for presentation time. Our membership, through individual delegates or our subject matter committees determine the resolutions that will be submitted for consideration by our membership and when deemed appropriate for consideration, they become a priority matter for our organization.

At our November General Membership meeting, a resolution was introduced concerning the Level of Service (LOS) element of the Public Spaces Master Plan (PSMP). Per our procedures and custom, draft resolutions are forwarded to committees for review and comment. In this case, four committees (Park & Recreation, Environmental Affairs, Schools and Revenue & Expenditures) consisting of over 20 people reviewed the resolution and felt the resolution had merits to be considered by the General Membership. Suggestions were made to strengthen the language of the original draft and was considered at the January 8th meeting of the Civic Federation. This [Resolution](#) was approved by a vote of 66 “yes,” 17 “no,” and 3 “abstentions,” one of the highest vote totals for a Civic Federation resolution in recent years.

While the County Manager's office did approach the Civic Federation requesting an opportunity to present a comprehensive overview of the PSMP, we reminded them that the resolution in question concerned the Level of Service element of the PSMP and not the PSMP overall. We also noted that there had been quite a few presentations of the PSMP including to several of our member organizations and other County advisory groups, but none had taken an in-depth look at LOS. We didn't believe a longer, more general program would be helpful in addressing the central questions around LOS.

The Civic Federation understands that the LOS is a small component of the PSMP. We recognize that staff and citizens have spent almost three years in developing the PSMP and that there are many points of the PSMP that are to be applauded. The proponents of the LOS resolution also recognized the efforts of the PSMP Advisory Committee in this effort.

The Civic Federation initially invited the co-Chairs of the PSMP Advisory Committee including the Director of the Department of Parks and Recreation to attend the panel regarding the resolution. Ultimately, the County identified a second citizen member of the PMSP Advisory

Committee to accompany the Committee Chair instead of staff members to explain the County's plan.

The Manager's office expressed concerns about a lack of civility that had occurred at previous forums. We suspect that the LOS resolution presented to the Civic Federation would not have come forth if citizens hadn't felt disenfranchised during the POPS process. It must be noted that the Civic Federation bears no responsibility for instances of incivility that may have hampered previous public debate. We read a civility statement before the panel discussion began to try to prevent such behavior. We endeavor to engage in civil civic conversations inclusive of differing viewpoints.

The Civic Federation applauds the efforts of the County Manager in spearheading efforts towards better public engagement in Arlington. In the past year, we have joined forces with the County Manager in this endeavor. We followed up with the Manager after our program and appreciate his open door to the Civic Federation. The meeting was very productive for moving forward. We look forward to continuing this effort in collaboration with the County Manager's Office to explore ways to improve public engagement processes so that citizens believe they have been honestly listened to and avoid future resolutions that may come to the Civic Federation highlighting breakdowns in Arlington's public outreach efforts.