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January 2, 2008

The Honorable Paul D. Fraim  
Mayor, City of Norfolk  
City Hall  
810 Union St.  
Norfolk, VA 23510

Mr. Fraim

Members of Bayview Civic League wish to express our deep disappointment and dismay at the practices and direction of our city government.

First: The failure to follow the proper procedures in selecting a person to fill the newly created position which led to the fiasco when the complete record of the person selected came out. Either city officials did not know of his record when they should have or the person responsible for the decision did know and chose not to share that information or actually tried to hide. That raises real concerns about the city's hiring practices and made our city look incompetent. Also it is hard to understand the haste with which this decision was made, with no advertisement or competition, when the position of City Planning Director remained vacant for two years and the position of Director of Parks and Recreation remained vacant for three years leading to marked deterioration in that department.

Second: We have a very real concern about the lack of transparency in the actions and decisions of the city council, the all too many meetings that take place behind closed doors, and the lack of responsiveness to citizen concerns. Citizens should not have to take the council to court to get them to listen. It seems that the mayor and council get some idea or goal in their minds and one way to achieve it and are not ready or willing to listen to other ideas or concerns. We are also concerned about the total failure of planning in some areas such as what would happen to the Kirn Library materials and collections when the building has to be razed for light rail resulting in a last minute, temporary, and not very satisfactory solution which results in decreased or delayed access to some collections, concern about the irreplaceable materials in the historical collection, and great stress for the library employees.

The third concern we have is the acts of one council member to try to frame every disagreement or controversy in terms of race, leading to greater divisions within the city. The record of the accomplishments and problems of any person being appointed to a high position in city government should be available and open to scrutiny by the citizens who, after all, would be paying the person's salary. The concerns raised about Mr. Albert's record had nothing to do with

*"Together, we make things better."*

his race but were with his qualifications for the position. That would be the same regardless of the ethnic background of the proposed candidate.

Lastly, we do not feel that Norfolk is being well served by its council or city manager and we strongly feel that this needs to be corrected. Customer service is poor to non-existent with most city departments, from the top down. As citizens, we find that the return on our investment is minimal. Citizen trust is a necessary attribute of healthy city government but is sorely lacking in Norfolk. It takes consistent, positive, well-planned and transparent behavior to build and maintain trust. The trust of city government by its citizens must be rebuilt and maintained.

Sincerely,

Dranan Sparks  
President