



COMMONWEALTH OF VIRGINIA
COUNTY OF HENRICO

John A. Vithoulkas
County Manager

January 31, 2017

Ms. Carol Nitz
Chair
Henrico Business Council
910 East Main Street, Suite 1700
Richmond, Virginia 23219-4622

Dear Ms. Nitz:

On behalf of the County of Henrico, I am submitting a letter supporting the nomination of The Honorable Frank J. Thornton for the 2017 Henrico Community Leader of the Year Award.

Frank has been an elected member of the Henrico County Board of Supervisors for more than 21 years representing the Fairfield Magisterial District. He was the first African American to be elected to the Board and to serve as its chairman.

A native of Richmond, Frank graduated from Armstrong High School and received his undergraduate degree in French education from Virginia Union University (VUU). After teaching high school in Lancaster County, Virginia, and Dorchester County, Maryland, Frank earned a master's degree in 20th century French literature from VUU. He retired from VUU in 2014 after a distinguished 43-year career there as an assistant professor of French.

Frank was active in local civic associations, the Boy Scouts, and the Big Brother program before helping organize the Henrico Civic League in 1980. After many years of fighting for more responsive representation in the county government, Mr. Thornton decided to run for public office. He was elected to the Board of Supervisors in 1995 and immediately became an advocate for improved schools and services in eastern

Henrico. By hosting monthly constituent meetings, Frank succeeded in making county government more transparent in his district and in involving citizens in public policy discussions in such critical areas as public safety, education, recreation, and community development. He also worked hard to diversify representation on local and regional boards and commissions with favorable results.

Over the years, Frank has played a major role in spearheading projects such as marking the historical area of Gabriel's Rebellion, introducing the national Police Athletic League (PAL) program to Henrico County, and establishing a public recreation center on Laburnum Avenue that serves the eastern portion of the County. In addition, he has helped forge stronger regional relationships through his service on the Maymont Foundation Board of Directors, Richmond Metropolitan Planning Organization Policy Board, Richmond Regional Planning Commission, Capital Region Workforce Partnership Consortium of Chief Local Elected Officials, and Capital Region Airport Commission. Frank was recently elected to the Virginia Association of Counties Board of Directors as a representative of the Richmond region.

One of Frank's biggest concerns has been the need for more quality housing and employment opportunities in eastern Henrico County. During his more than two decades on the Board of Supervisors, he has worked closely with citizens, businesses, and developers to enhance residential communities and business corridors in his district. Thanks to these efforts, the district's property values have continued to improve and eastern Henrico has begun to enjoy amenities that previously were the province of the western end of the county.

Frank is a strong advocate for public transportation and currently serves on the Virginia Transit Association Board of Directors. He has promoted GRTC's rapid transit bus service, Pulse, which is scheduled to begin later this year and will give eastern Henrico residents better access to downtown Richmond. Frank has also worked with GRTC and County staff for a number of years to expand traditional GRTC bus service in his district and ensure greater connectivity between eastern and western Henrico by redirecting resources towards routes that will most benefit users.

The achievement in which Frank perhaps takes the most pride is PAL, which officially took root in eastern Henrico County in 2007. The national PAL program has a long history of providing alternatives for at-risk youth and is one of the oldest citizen-building youth programs in the nation. It builds friendships between law enforcement officers and children in the community and assists youth in setting goals and taking advantage of new life opportunities. The Henrico PAL program operates under the umbrella of a non-profit 501(c)(3) organization with the cooperation of the community and offers year-round and seasonal athletic and recreation programs, after-school education and mentorship programs, summer camps, and much more. Mr. Thornton was PAL's chief patron in Henrico and worked tirelessly in selling the program to the rest of the Board of Supervisors, the Henrico Police Division, and the County administration.

PAL has had tremendous success and has gained the support of the local business community. The number of corporate and organizational sponsors continues to grow, along with the program. Frank's passion for PAL is understandable. He credits the Red Shield Boys' Club in Richmond and its boxing ring with keeping him on the straight and narrow when he was a teenager. Frank grew up in a segregated society that offered limited opportunities and little support for African American youth. The more than 2,000 at-risk youth who annually participate in activities sponsored by Henrico PAL have found a safe haven and the prospect of a brighter future. Frank has often pointed to the generosity of the business community as a major factor in the program's success.

Since the inception of Henrico PAL, more than 18,000 youth have participated in the organization's programs and activities. Additionally, more than 90 percent of the Youth Leadership Council members attend college after graduating high school. Mr. Thornton facilitated donations for at least four vans, which were instrumental in jump starting the after-school and summer camps. Currently, he serves as an Executive Board Member, and his continued support allows Henrico PAL to be one of the best youth crime prevention programs in the Richmond Metropolitan Area.

Another initiative that came to fruition in Henrico County in 2007 is the Small, Minority, and Women-owned (SWAM) supplier relations program, which is operated by the County's Purchasing Division. Since

the Board of Supervisors adopted the program, there has been a steady increase in the number of County contracts and amount of County spending with SWAM suppliers. Approximately 60 percent of the County's contract awards and competitive spending now go to companies that meet the definition of SWAM. Frank moved the Board of Supervisors resolution that established this program ten years ago and has been the program's most enthusiastic cheerleader. The SWAM program has ensured that the County's procurement process is inclusive as well as cost effective. It has greatly exceeded expectations and significantly outperformed the state's program. Many other localities have looked to Henrico's SWAM program as a best practice model for achieving supplier diversity.

Finally, I wish to point out that Frank has been an active participant in Henrico Business Council activities and programs. He has developed close relationships with business leaders and organizations in his district, such as the Lakeside Business Association, and throughout Henrico County. He understands the value of public-private partnerships and the essential role Henrico's businesses play in sustaining a strong local economy and tax base.

Frank Thornton has noted on a number of occasions that Henrico's renowned status was diligently earned. He has made invaluable contributions to what we frequently refer to as "The Henrico Way" through his leadership, determination, diligence, and concern. He is truly worthy of the Community Leader of the Year honor.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "John A. Vithoukas", written over a horizontal line.

John A. Vithoukas
County Manager