

To: John Hurd, Chair, Select Board  
Diane Mahon, Member, Select Board  
Lenard Diggins, Member, Select Board  
Adam Chapdelaine, Town Manager

From: Joseph A. Curro, Jr., Vice Chair, Select Board  
Stephen DeCoursey, Member, Select Board

Subject: Recommendations for Black Lives Matter Banner and Other Displays

Date: December 30, 2020

Symbols and visual displays have power and serve as important and abiding reminders for Arlington residents. Rainbow and Trans flags and crosswalks during Pride Month, youth public art hanging from light poles in the spring, bunting and American flags for observances of patriotic holidays, and banners for Town Day and other community events elevate our shared commitments to one another and thereby strengthen our life together.

The recent display of a Black Lives Matter banner on Town Hall not only falls within this tradition, but more importantly carries an urgency for residents of color who feel excluded or otherwise marginalized. By lifting up a visible symbol of the importance of Black lives, we affirm our Town's moral commitment to the struggle for racial justice and to related initiatives, including recent Community Conversations on Race & Reform and the development of Arlington's Racial Equity Action Plan.

Town Meeting Members recently approved a resolution expressing support for the display of a Black Lives Matter banner at Town Hall. At the same time, some have voiced concern that an unqualified statement implies support for a specific political organization. As the Board considers the adoption of a plan regarding the display of a banner, we should take into account Town Meeting's sentiment while also accommodating a number of complementary public policy matters, including:

- The relative impact of regularly recurring displays vs. perpetual displays.
- The shared nature of public space, such as the Town Hall entryway.
- The requirement to clearly distinguish any messaging as government speech.

In consideration of all of the above, we respectfully recommend the following:

- Development of a policy incorporating the longstanding precedent of displaying banners and other symbols and adornments on Town Hall in a temporary, recurring manner, in conjunction with specific observances, events, or Town initiatives, and in a way that respects the shared nature of public space.
- Customization of any Black Lives Matter banner with the seal of the Town and any additional language clarifying this as a statement of values, rather than an endorsement of a particular organization.
- Prioritization of the annual display of a newly customized Black Lives Matter banner from a date in January preceding the Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. Birthday Observance and continuing through the February observance of Black History Month.
- Continuing to hear public comment about what other steps Arlington could take to reflect the spirit of these actions.