



Stephanie Hellman

Manor Hill · 4 days ago · 🌐



**** A MESSAGE FROM FAIRFAX VICE MAYOR HELLMAN ****

Dear Fairfax Community,

These are challenging times, both nationally and globally. The constant stream of troubling news can feel overwhelming. I hope you're finding moments to rest, recharge, and seek joy where you can. For me, that means practicing gratitude, staying connected with loved ones, and appreciating the beauty of our town and its surroundings. I try to remain focused on how I can best serve the community.

Locally, I know many residents are stretched thin—balancing work, family, and daily responsibilities. It's understandable that staying on top of local government isn't always a priority. I remember my own days of commuting to SF while raising young kids; I didn't have the bandwidth to follow town issues unless they directly impacted our schools. So, if you haven't been keeping up, I get it. That's why I want to share a few key updates:

1) Town Council Meetings & Public Discourse

Fairfax is a passionate community and we welcome civic engagement. However, a small, vocal group has made our council meetings increasingly hostile. Disruptions—including shouting, personal attacks, and even physical intimidation—have made it difficult for many residents to participate. We've had to request police presence to maintain order and ensure everyone feels safe.

As you likely know Elon Musk recently threatened "civilization is at stake"; he's terminated valuable domestic and global programs and thousands of federal workers. Meanwhile, here in Fairfax, we see a similar dynamic at play—certain individuals treating local politics like a war rather than a conversation among neighbors. Civic discourse should be respectful and productive. This town belongs to all of us, not just the loudest voices. If you've hesitated to attend meetings because of the tone, I encourage you to re-engage. Your voice matters and you can contribute toward positive change.

2) Facts Matter: Setting the Record Straight on Agenda Setting.

Misinformation is spreading on this platform, including false claims about how council agenda items are set. Here's the reality: In Fairfax, as in neighboring towns like San Anselmo, Mill Valley, Corte Madera, Larkspur, and Novato, the Mayor and Town (or City) Manager set the agenda, and a majority of the council is required to add new items. The staff time researching and documenting what is necessary for an agenda staff report is substantial. This ensures that staff resources are used efficiently and that council priorities reflect the needs of the broader community.

3) Town Finances: Stability & Transparency

Despite statements to the contrary, Fairfax remains on solid financial footing. Like all organizations we will be watching what happens with the trade policy (tariffs), inflation, interest rates but again - Fact matter:

- ✓ Our independent financial audits consistently receive the highest ratings.
- ✓ Town reserves have ranged from 27–40% over the past five years. (Reserves are a percentage of taxpayer funds set aside in the budget for 'just in case' scenarios, ensuring financial stability in unexpected situations.)

Fairfax's budget operates on a predictable cycle, with the majority of our revenue arriving in two primary tranches—June and December—when property tax payments are distributed. This means that while our expenses remain relatively consistent throughout the year, our cash flow fluctuates, creating periods where spending may appear to exceed revenue.

This is NOT deficit spending—it's a normal and expected part of municipal budgeting. During months when revenues have not yet arrived, it may seem like the town is operating at a shortfall. However, once property tax revenues are received, the budget balances as planned. Our financial planning accounts for this cycle, ensuring the town remains on solid fiscal footing throughout the year. This is why mid-year financial reports and year-end audits provide the most accurate picture of our budget health, rather than looking at any single month in isolation.

For more details, check out our Mid-Year Budget Report:

<https://storage.googleapis.com/proudcity/fairfaxca/2025/02/Item-1.-Midyear-Budget-Report.pdf>

4) Road Repairs: A Costly Reality

We all agree—our roads need work. Here's the reality: The recent repaving of just three blocks of lower Scenic cost \$700K. To fix our town's roads, we need over \$20M—far beyond what we can cut from our \$14M operating budget.

Last year, Measure H would have provided \$18M for roads. It didn't pass. Without new funding, we'll continue to fall behind. Let's have a conversation about real solutions. Please reach out to us with your thoughts.

<https://storage.googleapis.com/proudcity/fairfaxca/2024/06/Item-3.-Proposed-5-Year-Roads-Plan-with-Bond-Measure.pdf>

5) Annual Goal-Setting Retreat: Priorities for 2025-26

At our recent council retreat, I was shocked to hear arguments against applying Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion (DEI) in our decision making and removing climate action as a priority. Here's why both matter:

DEI ensures fair access to services, strengthens trust in local government, and fosters community engagement. How?

1. Building Trust with Residents – In small towns and communities, relationships matter. Ensuring all voices are heard and represented fosters trust in local leadership.
2. Fair Access to Local Services – Whether it's permitting, public safety, or community programs, small governments must ensure services are accessible and fair for all residents, especially those who have been historically underserved.
3. Stronger Community Engagement – Small governments rely on resident participation. Prioritizing DEI encourages broader involvement, leading to policies that truly reflect the needs of the whole community.
4. Addressing Local Challenges Fairly – Issues like housing, infrastructure, and economic development impact different groups in different ways. A DEI lens helps small governments craft solutions that work for everyone.
5. Economic Growth & Stability – Supporting diverse businesses and ensuring fair hiring practices can strengthen the local economy and create a more resilient community.
6. Avoiding Unintentional Harm – Small governments often work with limited resources and rely on longstanding practices. DEI helps leaders recognize and correct unintentional biases in policies and services.

Collective climate action is not optional—it's essential. Science is clear, and the urgency is real. Fairfax has a proud history of environmental leadership, and we must build on that legacy to protect our future.

Here's where we landed with the town goals - please send the council comments.
<https://storage.googleapis.com/proudcity/fairfaxca/2025/02/Item-3.e.-Council-Goals-for-FY25-26.pdf>

6) School Street Plaza: Proposed Housing Development

Many in our community have concerns about the scale of the proposed development at School Street Plaza. The town expects to receive a completed application from the developer in the coming months. I strongly believe the developer should engage with the community—residents, businesses, nonprofits, and town representatives—before submitting the application to hear concerns, ideas, and potential community benefits.

For example, could this project include a senior center or other amenities that serve our town's needs? I already reached out to the developer to request a community input session.

During our recent council retreat, we agreed that while we may have individual concerns, the Town Council will not take actions outside the law to stop the development. Council members must also be mindful not to make statements that could legally disqualify them from voting on the project when the time comes.

We know this is an important issue, and we encourage everyone to stay engaged and share their thoughts as the process moves forward.

7) Fire Safety: Get Prepared


Watch the Feb 10 "Wildfire Watch" and hear local experts on what happened in LA and what efforts are happening here in Marin to lower our risks and keep our community safe. Find out what you need to do to get prepared for wildfire. We have a shared responsibility to reduce wildfire risk and prevent losses. Please visit Fire Safe Marin. Make sure you and your loved ones are prepared and take necessary action. I also recommend checking out Marin Wildfire Prevention Authority to see how your tax dollars are making a difference.

Moving Forward, Together

My deepest hope for Fairfax is that we move toward civility, stability, and solutions—rooted in facts and mutual respect. We have so much to build on, from community projects to infrastructure improvements.

One example? If you've noticed construction on Park Road, it's because the Ross Valley Sanitation District is upgrading sewer lines. Once that's done, the town will launch a major storm drain and sidewalk project—reducing flooding and improving walkability. Progress is happening!

Let's keep the conversation going. You can email me or the whole council at shellman@townoffairfax.org or towncouncil@townoffairfax.org or join us at the next council meeting:

 Wednesday at 6:30 PM (Attend in person, via Zoom, or by phone)
<https://www.townoffairfax.org/meetings/town-council-meeting-march-5-2025/#/tab-agenda-packet>

Fairfax is a special place. Let's work together to keep it that way.
With gratitude,

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Add a comment...

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