

From the Editor.

Here's a question that we all should be asking ourselves as we step into 2026: what should people expect from their elected leaders? Not what sounds good in a campaign speech, but what a community has every right to require from the people entrusted to lead it.

In Fairfax County, that question is especially poignant because we are one of the most diverse counties in the country. Though an economic engine of the Commonwealth with strong schools, a deep federal presence, and residents who are engaged and informed, we are also a place where prosperity and struggle exist side by side. Where a strong tax base doesn't automatically mean equal access and equal opportunity. Fairfax County doesn't need leaders who are simply visible. We need leaders who are capable.

Here's what we should expect from our elected leaders in 2026:

Truth-telling over theater. We should expect leaders to speak plainly about constraints and tradeoffs—budget limits, legal boundaries, and what will realistically take time. Communities don't lose trust because leaders don't have magic wands. Communities lose trust when leaders pretend they do.

Tangible results. In 2026, we should expect more than announcements—we should expect tangible outcomes. That means steady service delivery, smart infrastructure planning, public safety that is both effective and accountable, housing work that grapples with real conditions, and a commitment to education that matches the stakes.

Inclusion with accountability. Inclusion must be more than a slogan. Belonging means residents can access government, understand decisions, and see themselves in the process, including language access and meaningful engagement. Accountability means leaders listen, measure progress, respond, and course-correct when needed.

Wise counsel governance. The strongest leaders aren't the loudest. They're the ones who invite honest input, welcome expertise, and can tolerate disagreement without punishing truth. A leader's maturity shows up in the culture they create. People should feel safe telling the truth, not disappointed into silence.

But community members must also remember that expectations are not one-sided. If we want better leadership, we have to practice better followership. We must show up beyond election season, read more than just the sensational headlines, hold leaders accountable without dehumanizing them, and reward honesty even when we disagree.

In 2026, let's raise our expectations and help each other maintain them. For ourselves, our neighbors, our leaders, our county, our nation and our democracy.

In Black,

Alpha Woolen



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