

ARLINGTON COUNTY CIVIC FEDERATION

Resolution Asking the Arlington County Board to Reconsider Its Policy of Classifying Consent Agenda Items as “Nonpublic”

Passed 39-0 by Member Organizations’ Delegates and Alternates
March 7, 2017

Whereas all Arlington County Board meeting consent agenda items are passed en masse with a single vote and without any public review or discussion at the beginning of regular Board meetings;

Whereas historically any member of the public could pull any County Board consent agenda item for public comment and Board discussion for any reason, so long as he/she pulled the item in person prior to a vote on the consent agenda being taken;

Whereas on Jan. 3, 2017, the Board voted to reclassify a significant percentage of consent agenda items as “nonpublic,” eliminating the public’s ability to pull any of these consent agenda items (for subsequent public comment and Board discussion) without the approval of at least one County Board member;

Whereas on the Board’s Jan. 28, 2017, meeting agenda, 34 items out of 37 total items were consent agenda items, representing approximately 92% of the Board’s entire agenda;

Whereas of the 34 consent agenda items, 13 items (including capital project contract awards, other contracts, appropriations, permanent and temporary easements/vacations of public property, and acquisition of private property) were classified as “nonpublic,” representing approximately 38% of the consent agenda;

Whereas new consent agenda items can be added (or changes to existing items made) and posted online less than 24 hours prior to a meeting’s start time — leaving the public and Board members without reasonable opportunity to review these new materials or changes, and leaving insufficient time for the public to ask a County Board member to pull a “nonpublic” consent agenda item;

Whereas consent agenda items are permitted to be added to the Board’s agenda in an incomplete state — for example, lacking staff reports and other essential supporting documents and pertinent information, containing material omissions or errors of fact, or not having met the Board’s guidelines for a full public process or review;

Whereas the Arlington County Board failed to ask the public or civic groups for input or feedback before passing this significant procedural change;

Therefore be it resolved, that the Arlington County Civic Federation (ACCF):

1. The ACCF respectfully requests the Arlington County Board to reconsider its new policy to classify certain consent agenda items as “nonpublic” and asks the Board to seek input and suggestions from the public and civic groups to create an alternative policy that allows the Board to conduct orderly meetings within a reasonable timeframe while also meeting the Board’s stated goals of improving government transparency and encouraging greater public participation in Arlington County government.
2. The ACCF further requests that the Arlington County Board adopt a rule requiring that all critical supporting documents and information pertinent to a public Board meeting agenda item or any significant change to an agenda item be sent to all Board members and posted on the County website at least 72 hours before the meeting at which a vote is scheduled, *unless* at least four Board members vote to waive the 72--hour requirement in case of emergency.

Suzanne Sundburg, Executive Committee and Revenues & Expenditures Committee Member