

City Council Public Testimony 062417

Madame Mayor, Mr. Vice Mayor, esteemed members of Council, City Manager Jinks and city staff, my name is Canek Aguirre and I am on the board of Tenants and Workers United.

I want to touch on an issue that Americans across the country are grappling with – how do we improve and strengthen the relationship between law enforcement and the communities they serve?

One solution is increased transparency and accountability.

Researchers at Stanford University recently found racial disparities in how police officers spoke to residents while analyzing police body camera footage from traffic and pedestrian stops in Oakland. The study found that “on the whole, police interactions with black community members are more fraught than their interactions with white community members.”

What is our situation like here in Alexandria? Honestly how are we to know if we are not tracking data points in relation to all stops? This is a conversation that we as a city need to have.

At the debate co-hosted by TWU during the 2015 city council elections, we asked each of you the following question:

“Do you support tracking and releasing data to ascertain if there is racial bias or disparity in City policing?”

Every single one of you answered YES.

As residents and taxpayers, we expect and deserve transparency and accountability from not just our elected officials and government, but also City employees, including the police department.

Before I continue, I'd like to take a moment to thank our officers for putting their safety on the line day in and day out to keep our city safe. The shooting just 10 days ago is testament to the dangers faced on any given day.

We applaud APD for taking upon itself the proposed implicit bias training for all officers.

We applaud the recently released study from George Mason University, analyzing the police department's traffic citation data from 2011 to 2015.

I would also like to personally commend and thank Police Chief Brown for his whirlwind tour of the city, meeting with a variety of community groups and stakeholders. I'm still not sure how he found the time to fit in sleep in his first couple of months. It is a true testament to his dedication.

These have all been steps in the right direction. But we can't be complacent now. We need to continue the progress that has been made.

I think we can all agree that we want to have data driven metrics. We do not see this as an “us vs them” situation, but as an issue that “WE” as a community – citizens and law enforcement - must tackle together.

To be able to have a conscientious discussion around this we need to ensure that data is being collected in a manner that can be analyzed and shared in an organized fashion.

Our coalition has put forth a proposed ordinance to move us in this direction.

If Council chooses not to discuss this then I ask what is it that you do propose? This issue is too important to simply let it lay by the wayside. We know that you must deal with a variety of issues and competing agendas. It is no easy task and that is why you sit on this dais because we have chosen you as our leaders to make these difficult decisions.

I ask that you find the courage to tackle this task. Thank you for your time and have a great summer recess.

-Canek Aguirre

TWU Board Member

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6-24-17

Gloria Sitton

From: elizabeth@togetherwebake.org
Sent: Saturday, June 24, 2017 12:57 PM
To: Gloria Sitton
Subject: Public Discussion Comments for Written Record

Hi Gloria,

It was so nice to meet you earlier - thank you for all your help. I forgot to turn in my written comments, so am including below in case it's still possible to include them in the written record. I'm also including Tom Sisk's comments.

Good morning Mayor Silberberg and Members of the City Council,

My name is Elizabeth Bennett Parker and I am the Co-Director of Together We Bake. We are a nonprofit job training and personal development program for women in need, located less than a half mile away on S. Washington Street.

We work with women who have been formerly incarcerated or homeless, as well as those who have recently immigrated or been out of work for a long period. Our program provides job training in food production and food safety, as well as empowerment and self-confidence building. We pair each woman with a job counselor to work on resume writing, interview skills, and applying to jobs. We also facilitate partnerships with local employers, such as Sugar Shack Donuts and Starbucks, to hire our graduates.

This is our fifth year of operation, we have graduated 110 women from our program, and for those who have been in the criminal justice system, our recidivism rate is 8% compared to the national average of 70%. We employ three of our own graduates. And as we continue to grow, we will be able to train and hire more women, thereby helping more of our City's most vulnerable residents facing barriers to employment.

However, there are some policies under the jurisdiction of the City that are inhibiting our growth. Specifically, those surrounding the Old Town Farmers Market.

We have been denied entry for several years now and the underlying factors are policies that are not only hurting us, but are a disservice to the creation or growth of other Alexandria-based food-businesses.

Applicants to the market are given preference if they: produce goods themselves; offer a quality product unique to the market; are located within 100 miles; offer a consumable good; and demonstrate the ability to sell to the market's 7,000 customers.

It is important to note that vendors do not have to meet all of these to be accepted; those who do are given preference. We meet all of these criteria, but have been told the reason we haven't gotten in is because the market already has enough baked good vendors, many of whom operate outside Alexandria.

Leaving aside the fact that only two of our products - our cookies and granola - are baked goods, let's examine the other vendors at the market. There are more baked goods from Herndon, from Reva, Virginia (which is an hour and a half away), and Silver Spring, Maryland, than there are from our city.

Additionally, in speaking with the market manager, I learned that we are not likely to ever get a regular spot at the market because she indicated the current policies and procedures grandfather in existing vendors. It's an excellent market, and so vendors don't voluntarily stop participating, which means there aren't spots for newer vendors, particularly in popular categories.

The market manager loves our mission and wants to help, but is bound by these policies that do a disservice to our community.

So, I propose three changes to the Farmers Market criteria:

1. Prioritize Alexandria-based businesses (provided they meet the other criteria) over businesses from other localities. We know that small businesses create jobs and support our local community. Don't we want that in Alexandria? I know that other Alexandria-based businesses, such as Popped Republic, support these changes. Additionally, supporting the growth of Alexandria-based businesses ultimately means more sales tax revenue for the City.
2. Eliminate the grandfathering of existing vendors to allow for new, qualified entrants to the market. Farmers markets are how small food businesses start and grow, especially those operating under the Virginia Cottage Food Law, which allows home-based businesses, but only allows the resulting goods to be sold at farmers markets. If new businesses to want start in Alexandria and can't get into our Market, where will they go? By continuing current policies, the City of Alexandria could be stopping the next Sugar Shack Donuts, Blueprint Chocolates, or Alexandria Cupcakes.
3. Give preference to nonprofits or social enterprises, provided they meet the rest of the criteria.

In conclusion, one-third of our funding comes from product sales, and is especially important given the unpredictability/unreliability of donations and grants, which make up the rest of our funding.

Thus, our sales are directly tied to our growth and our ability to train and hire more of our city's most vulnerable women.

I look forward to working with you to resolve these issues. Thank you.

Elizabeth Bennett Parker

I came here today to speak in favor of allowing more local vendors into the Alexandria Farmers Market. Old Town is a historic place. A special place. It celebrates those traditions. From the ghost tours to the cobblestone streets to the Scottish Walk, this city prides itself... and markets itself... on its history... its traditions.

This reality is why the idea of not letting local vendors like Together We Bake into the Alexandria Farmers Market makes so little sense to me. New organizations like Together We Bake are tomorrow's Murphy's or Pop's.... Old Town traditions that become powerful symbols of the community... and its values.

Before moving back to Old Town I lived in Falls Church. I regularly went to its Farmers Market. Imagine my surprise when I found the same pastry company, Grace's pastries, or the same pasta company, Cavanna, at this Farmers Market when I first went there. The same goods in the same place... I found its surprising when Alexandria has so many unique things to offer.

Farmer Markets have always struck me as showpieces for a community. It's the place you always run into people you know on Saturday morning, the place you take you family or friends when they are visiting from out of town, and the place that travel guides and hotel concierges point tourists to when they visit. Georgetown... a community much like Old Town in terms of its traditions... makes sure all their food vendors at its events are local. Shouldn't the Old Town Farmers Market do the same thing and feature business from its community?

Together We Bake makes fantastic cookies, kale chips, and other snacks. Clearly, I eat a lot of them. It is a nonprofit with a fantastic mission to help those to have stumbled in life find their footing again. But it also has the opportunity to be another symbol of what makes this community special. What makes it the place where we are proud to live. I think we should let them have the opportunity to try.

Thomas Sisk