

## **Foreword to Mayor Garver's Open Letter to the City Council**

Mayor George Garver read an open letter into the record in place of his opening remarks at the last City Council meeting. His thoughts and observations seem relevant not only to the City Council, but to any deliberative governing body from a community association to the highest levels of government. Mayor Garver's message seems particularly relevant and thoughtful as our new Sun City Community Association Board of Directors just began working together. This is an important election year. We will be voting for leaders at many governmental levels to address the numerous important issues of the day. For your consideration, the following is the entire letter as presented in the City Council meeting.

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Good evening Ladies and Gentlemen:

This evening I would like to alter my normal welcome. In its place, I would like to present an open letter from me that I will read into the record.

Before I read this letter I wish to offer a statement of clarification. When I refer to our City Council in this document I include myself as a member. Thus the content of this paper is directed to me as well as all other members of the Council with the exception of our new members, Mr. Gonzalez and Mr. Meigs, who have little personal history with our past governance process.

### **An Open Letter to the Members of the City Council**

It is no secret that the working relationship between the elected officials of this City has for sometime been strained and far less than cordial. Therefore, this evening I am requesting that we all make a commitment to move away from this destructive modality and into a different, positive working relationship.

Historically, our City has earned distinction as a city of excellence. I am quite sure that we all ran for office on a platform including a commitment stating our highest priority was quality leadership for a distinguished city. To this end, we promised the finest leadership in a truly open governmental process. In return, we hoped that our behavior would elicit community pride in the elected officials. However, I fear this is not how many citizens currently view our performance.

If we appear to be less than exemplary, we endanger some very important City priorities. As an example, one of the high priorities for our City is quality economic growth. Prospective investors could be discouraged from a commitment to invest in Georgetown if we are perceived as a City where the elected officials are unable to get along and are not providing quality, open leadership.

As elected officials, we should retain our core values and recognize the will of our constituents. Those of us who answer the call to public service are well aware that our willingness to serve our community does expose us to public scrutiny, so we should always strive to perform with the highest level of integrity. With this as a given, it is not surprising that our perspectives may differ from time to time. Disagreements, often healthy for differing points of view, should be heard and debated. This is the essence of quality open governance. The key to this process is a new, high level of civility between all parties and the masterful use of compromise.

Georgetown maintains the reputation of being one of our nation's preferred communities and is often referred to as a city of excellence. We have reasonably priced housing, taxes that are lower than most comparable communities, and many other attractive amenities. However, to become truly great, these strengths need to be supplemented with exceptional schools, a strong employment base, excellent health care, quality public safety, and a high level of civil discourse.

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We, as a city of excellence, need a city government that is skilled in providing leadership for the accomplishment of strategic goals developed by the City along with a demonstrated commitment to reach these goals. If any of these core values falter our chances of achieving an even higher standard of excellence are greatly reduced.

In our case, looking back will likely serve no useful purpose. Whatever the issues and behaviors were that brought us to this point, they need to be put behind us. It is essential that we move forward in a collegial manner and in the best interests of our City. I ask that all of us test our behavior with a simple question. "Are our behaviors in the best interests of our City and quality governance?"

In some settings, the problems we have been experiencing could have materially affected the operations of a city. Thanks to the excellent leadership of our City Manager and the entire City staff our City is operating very well. We owe our staff our deep appreciation and sincere thanks for their wonderful service and dedication.

Our job as elected officials is to set the policies for the City and to provide oversight where stipulated by either our Charter or our City Ordinances. I encourage us to remember that Council speaks only through its actions at the dais.

While perfection is often a desired goal, none of us are infallible, and we need to accept the fact that our governance process will never be perfect. In spite of this fact, we can work to provide the finest model of open, quality governance. (Hopefully Congress might even be able to take some lessons from us.)

Tonight, I am asking each of you to join with me in pledging that we will set aside whatever differences we may have. We must put to rest any unresolved personal and philosophical disagreements and recommit ourselves to the service of our community.

Moving forward, let us treat each other with genuine respect as we listen to diverse ideas and concepts. There will be times when our differences will be obvious, but let us confine ourselves to the merits of the issues before us. Let us vote our consciences without fear of criticism or rebuke.

In conclusion, a personal observation may be appropriate. Our City Council has for the past several years asked a member of the Clergy to offer an invocation at our meetings as we did this evening. Often the one giving the invocation prays for Council, and these prayers are appreciated. However, we should remember that God will seldom do for us what we can do for ourselves. While God may watch our performance, it is up to us to develop the behaviors which will allow us to demonstrate to one and all how elected individuals can provide the finest leadership in an open governance process.

Thank you for your courtesy and attention.

Respectfully submitted,

George G. Garver  
August 10, 2010