



TOWN OF FAIRFAX

142 BOLINAS ROAD, FAIRFAX, CALIFORNIA 94930
(415) 453 - 1584 / FAX (415) 453 - 1618

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Dear Fairfax Community,

In these times of great uncertainty, lightning fast changes, mandates from higher governing bodies regarding a once in a generation pandemic, it is arrogant, presumptuous and ‘tone deaf’ for us decision makers to believe that we can continue business as usual. Many decisions we are tasked with making especially in this environment of unknowns are informed by our own vision, hope or despair and are based on our own values and our understanding of what we hear from our community. At this moment in time our direction forward is predicated on scientific hypotheses, amidst calls for systemic change from our next generation. These calls deserve and demand to be listened to. Our role in these anxious times is to seek out the unprecedented opportunities and connect and listen to our communities despite that we are mandated to “shelter in place”.

The very nature and intention of SIP is to physically isolate. If we Town Council Members are to connect with our communities, we must invent new modes, learn new technologies, and open ourselves to one another using senses that understandably many of us are not well versed in using.

Day after day the IJ publishes the same article with a new headline, swapping out the names of our 11 incorporated Cities and towns in Marin County, as we turn to “Listening Sessions”. These sessions may seem insignificant to some, but I see them as a profound first step to considering needed changes to our embedded systems, upheld not only by our municipal codes but by the unwritten codes of social conduct constrained by social constructs.

The Town Council hosted our own “Listening Session” this week, inviting the public to express themselves, their experiences and their opinions regarding issues of racial equity and social justice. Compelling and emotional public expression was followed with an action item regarding the formation of a committee to address issues around race and social justice, and a subcommittee to discuss and examine policy issues including police practices and alternative approaches to public safety, housing and other policies that many feel lead to racial segregation and lack of inclusivity.

These sessions may be the first tiny step in an evolving paradigm shift. I feel strongly that in order to produce anything substantial, we as a Town Council are even further obligated to conduct honest self-inquiry, and explore our own understanding of the deeply important differences between **Hearing** and **Listening**.

A member of our community recently told me: “When communicating with others, I most often become frustrated when I feel the person is not listening to what I am saying. No matter how I say it, how many times I say it, explain, re-explain, or give specific examples about the topic, they are hearing me and not listening to what I am saying.”

I know that we were mostly taught this in grade school, but a quick google search provided me with this simple but profound reminder.

Hearing

- Easy: accidental; automatic.
- Passive: involuntary; effortless.
- Physical Function: involves the ears.

Listening

- Hard: requires practice and being alert.
- Active: a conscious effort; requires focused involvement.
- Internal Behavior: involves mind and body.

I thought I would invite each of you to remember an experience when you were passionate about something and felt that despite your words being heard, you were not listened to.

Some of you may be recalling an experience where you felt that I as the Mayor was not listening. My commitment is to continue developing my listening skills, as the first step toward embracing what I feel called upon to consider in order to effect change.

Please wear your masks, but uncover your ears and involve your body and mind as you listen, so that we can proceed with the hard work and emerge more compassionate and inclusive, making our community one that knows each other, in a time when so many feel alienated, and unwelcome.

Renee Goddard

Mayor of Fairfax