



TOWN OF FAIRFAX

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Remote but Ever-Connected

My first experience with a remote control was with an old television that barely worked unless you pounded the top of it with your fist, and twirled the antennae to find reception. I remember holding the button with my thumb, pointing and waving the foreign object frantically trying to make it all the way through "I love Lucy". Right around the same time, I became obsessed with a game called 'Pong' where a 'joy stick' moved two vertical .5 inch lines up and down the screen serving as rackets to hit a digital dot back and forth over a center line. I have dramatically dated myself, but I distinctly remember feeling at the time that we were reverting to parallel play just as we had begun to master interaction and communication.

2020 has stretched our community to it's limits, and in doing so, repositioned us facing forward into the future with a refined road map and a skill set to help us find our way.

At times I have felt like that child pressing the remote control button with my thumb, hoping for a successful connection, or the little digital Pong dot exhausted on the court in the world's longest rally.

With the Shelter In Place order on March 16th, everything came to a screeching halt and humans went remote.

Fairfax rose to the life altering occasion. Social distancing was mandated and remote digital connectivity quickly filled it's place, an adaptation, the antidote to social isolation.

New interactive modalities were identified and vocabulary was quickly colloquialized, such as "un-muting" each other on zoom calls or "freezing" in the midst of the hottest year on record.. Town Council meetings could now be conducted in pajama pants and most interestingly to me was watching myself talk to a screen, observing my own facial expressions in real time as I listened to those I could not see.

We could not have imagined the potential benefits of virtual communication in providing access to public meetings.

On-line tools grew and amplified the Black Lives Matters movement, enabled a virtual National Convention (at least one), broadcast virtual Climate Conferences and activism reaching unprecedented tens of thousands of people. We saw the world's largest on-line Choral gathering, on-line end of life Ceremonies, Passover Seders, zoom happy hours and dance parties. I foresee the next Guinness Book of World Records, the virtual version.

There is causality between the events of 2020. At the start of the shelter in place order, many of us had the privilege of enjoying extraordinary blue skies and walks to beautiful open lands, but that land was not accessible to those who don't live close to open space. There were postings at the entrance to our watershed reading "Access for locals Only." We enjoyed the cleanest air on record because many of us could work remotely and not drive, while a large majority of essential and frontline workers who rely on public transportation or carpooling to jobs were disproportionately exposed to the virus and had no time to enjoy that same fresh air. The digital divide was especially pronounced with remote learning which unfairly disadvantaged students in underserved parts of our county. Some High School students used new Covid related grading policies to their advantage to gain admission to elite Universities while other students hunted for wifi connections in order to attend classes merely to remain eligible to graduate.

The events of 2020 provided opportunity for a deeper look at our assumptions. George Floyd's murder shocked the world and we narrowed our focus, committing to holding up an equity magnifying lens and centering racial justice in our discussions. While we began creating new systems to transform old systems, the gaping equity divide was widening. The beneficiaries of the silver linings of 2020, the blue skies, family bike rides and tech innovations were the usual suspects, and those who carry the bulk of the burdens are again the underserved and marginalized communities.

Thankfully, the Racial and Social Justice Movements of our time are being led by youth. There is a language that our generation is not well versed in, and best we observe and learn and wait to be invited in.

The number of young people elected to public office in Marin on November 2nd was unprecedented. They dazzled us with digital fluency. They provided evidence that remote connections can shift paradigms. The campaigns run by our younger candidates were visionary and responsive, based in logical and emotional intelligence.

In a year where fear was pervasive in our community our students and the younger generation of leaders stayed fundamentally hopeful, impassioned and unafraid to demand change.

Paul Hawken in his 2007 book Blessed Unrest writes about the intersection of climate and social justice and how the largest movement in the world came into being. He writes; "The internet and other communication technologies have revolutionized what is possible for small groups to accomplish and are accordingly changing the loci of power".

We are living in that moment, in that movement.

This year we have walked through an unrecognizable world together. We have physically distanced and virtually intertwined, interconnecting generations, races, cultures and beliefs.

Where once there was pong and 2 lines and a dot there is now a global network and opportunity for good on a mammoth scale.

I am grateful to have been the Mayor of Fairfax in 2020, and as I learned yesterday on Thanksgiving, gratitude translates across all communications platforms, and the expression of thanks offers a moment for introspection, a respite from what ails us to remember what sustains us.

Stay connected & PLEASE wear a mask to keep yourselves and others safe. We will make it through together!

With great hope and respect,

Renee Goddard

Mayor of Fairfax, CA