



CITY MANAGER
CITY OF DURHAM

August 2, 2020

Mayor Steve Schewel and Councilmembers
City of Durham, North Carolina

Dear Mayor Schewel and Councilmembers:

Like many Durhamites, the last five months, mostly spent "Safer at Home", as our country and community responded to COVID-19 and racial injustices, has elicited an array of emotions. Fear, uncertainty, confusion, frustration, optimism, and hope are just a few that I have experienced. One of my favorite passages of the Old Testament (Ecclesiastes 3:1-14) frequently came to mind..."There is a time for every activity under the heaven: a time to be born and a time to die, a time to plant and a time to uproot, ...a time to embrace and a time to refrain from embracing, a time to tear down and a time to rebuild, a time to be silent and a time to speak... I know there is nothing better for people than to be happy and to do good while they live. That each of them may eat and drink, and find satisfaction in all their toil..."

I am satisfied and happy with my work in public service for over 42 years (35 as a City Manager) and have come to acknowledge and accept, that for a variety of personal and professional reasons, it is time to retire as Durham City Manager, effective September 30, 2020.

From the personal perspective, working as a City Manager has required a daily commitment, with regular weekend and evening time away from family. I am truly blessed to have a supportive and loving wife throughout this journey who is always there, to have meals prepared, children taken care of, and a calm home waiting, regardless of how long or late I was working. It is time to recapture as much of this time as possible with Karen, our children and grandchildren. Additionally, I turned 65 in May and officially entered one of the high-risk groups associated with COVID-19 cases. I anticipate that restrictions of gatherings and crowds, even for those not in high-risk, will continue to be with us for a significant time. As a leader of this organization and in the community, it is imperative that the City Manager transition back from the virtual world in which we are currently operating to active and direct engagement with employees and residents. It is likely that hesitations of my higher risk exposure will continue to limit the necessities of the job.

From the professional perspective, I acknowledge the myriad of daunting challenges Durham currently faces including: COVID-19 response and recovery, community economic recovery, restoring the City's financial stability, implementing racial equity initiatives, and evaluating community safety and policing options, (not to mention pre-COVID-19 priorities associated with comp and transit plan updates, affordable housing implementation, 100% renewable energy goal, violent crime reduction, shared economic prosperity, and equitable engagement), all with significant implementation horizons, are well in advance of any continued public service I had contemplated. It is important and imperative that the next City Manager be selected as soon as possible and a part of developing these strategies, not burdened with implementing inherited plans and strategies. The community and City Council will be better served with a new City Manager in place.

When I began my service as Durham City Manager in 2008 the City was entering the depths of the "great recession". I am extremely proud of the work and our leadership team's accomplishments that brought the City to a path of financial strength and strategic governance. An organization that has continued to flourish and be consistently recognized nationally and within the State of North Carolina for its management,



innovation and accomplishments. I am confident these foundations will be our organization's strength as Durham and the organization recovers from and responds to current and new challenges and priorities.

Any feelings of departure guilt I have are quickly erased when I proudly reflect on the incredibly talented executive and departmental leadership that exists in the organization, along with the amazing dedication to public service of all our employees. I hope and pray that you will not take this for granted and will continue to support our leaders and employees.

I am thankful and proud to have had the opportunity to be Durham's City Manager. The past twelve years have been the most rewarding and enjoyable of my 42 -year local government career. I am appreciative of the support I have enjoyed from elected officials, employees, and the community.

I look forward to discussing how I can best be of service to you and the residents of Durham in these final months.

Sincerely,



Thomas J. Bonfield
City Manager

