



December 20, 2019

Arlington County Board
2100 Clarendon Boulevard
Suite 300
Arlington, VA 22201

Dear Chair Dorsey,

Retail businesses succeed when they are able to market their goods and services. Simple signage, like window signs and sandwich boards, can help small businesses attract customers. Unfortunately, many of our small businesses find that the rigidity of Arlington's signage rules inhibits their ability to advertise effectively.

Arlington County government should take a more flexible approach in enforcing signage rules. The primary focus of review and enforcement should be on supporting the outcomes that businesses are trying to achieve with their signs. When assessing a signage application, the Chamber encourages planning and enforcement divisions to respond to the actual proposal in front of them. Flexibility in enforcement will allow our community to settle on the appropriate signage solutions that support Arlington's businesses and residents.

The signage ordinance should also be simpler. The rules as they exist are highly technical, and many small business owners have difficulty understanding what's allowed and what's not. Arlington County should communicate the rules in a manner that businesses can easily understand, with a clear focus on explicit "dos" and "don'ts." The Chamber encourages the County government to distill the ordinance into a simple reference document. Having simple rules and a clear guide to them will support both retailers and County staff in applying the signage ordinance.

Arlington businesses have also faced challenges with inconsistent applications of the existing regulations. Our members have experienced one division of County government saying that a sign is permissible, only for another division to say that it is not. Such confusion can lead to wasted investment and frustration. The Chamber encourages all County divisions enforce the rules identically. Moreover, the common interpretation and enforcement should be broadly applicable and fairly stable over time to give proprietors the confidence to invest in signage for their businesses.

The collective challenge that Arlington's small businesses face with signage raises the issue as one of the more significant impacts on our business. The Chamber asks the County Board and Manager to direct the Planning staff to include updating the signage ordinance in their work plan to make it more flexible, simple, and consistent. We further encourage the Planning staff to ask for input from the business community as they carry out this work. We look forward to working with Arlington County staff and elected leadership to reach solutions that will allow Arlington's small businesses to market themselves effectively and to grow their business.

Thank you for your consideration of these comments.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Kate Bates". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Kate Bates
President & CEO

CC: Arlington County Board Vice Chair Libby Garvey and members Katie Cristol, Matt de Ferranti, and Erik Gutshall; County Manager Mark Schwartz