Thornton, Nelson tapped to lead Board in 2015

Noting that Henrico is entering a period of renewed growth, new Board of Supervisors Chairman Frank J. Thornton said the county is committed to meeting residents’ expectations for quality government services in 2015.

Thornton, the Fairfield District supervisor, spoke following his unanimous selection as chairman at the Jan. 13 meeting of the Board of Supervisors. The board also voted Varina District Supervisor Tyrone E. Nelson to serve as vice chairman. Both officials will serve a one-year term.

Thornton is beginning his fourth service as board chairman, a position he held most recently in 2011. He first was elected to represent Fairfield in 1995 and currently is serving his fifth term on the county’s board. He served as vice chairman last year and succeeds Tuckahoe District Supervisor Patricia S. O’Bannon as chairman.

Thornton said that Henrico’s reputation as a premier local government has been “diligently earned” and is the result of an operating principle known as the “Henrico Way.”

“The Henrico Way is our way of serving our citizens in which they are receiving optimal and positive results in government service,” he said. “In the 21st century government must recognize the new role of citizen expectations. It is my hope and our challenge that we take the Henrico Way to an even higher level during the upcoming year.”

Thornton noted that expectations for the county in 2015 include continued low taxes; improved financial growth; a more “people-friendly” approach to the public; improved accountability in all government agencies, including schools and parents; more appreciation of the county workforce; a recognition that Henrico has become more urbanized and eradication of the “east versus west syndrome.”

“As Henrico is on the precipice of a new era of renewed growth and expansion, it must also be poised to be a beacon of leadership and hope in the metro area,” he said. “Henrico will be moving forward.”

Thornton holds appointed positions with national, statewide and regional governmental organizations, including the National Association of Counties, Virginia Association of Counties, Richmond Regional Planning District Commission, Richmond Area Metropolitan Planning Organization and the Maymont Foundation.

A Richmond native, Thornton is a co-founder and past president of the Henrico County Civic
League. He earned a bachelor’s degree from Virginia Union University and a master’s degree from American University. He recently retired from full-time teaching at Virginia Union, where he worked for more than 40 years as an assistant professor of French and received the university’s Teacher of the Year award. Thornton also is a recipient of the John Jasper Trailblazer Award from Richmond’s Sixth Mount Zion Baptist Church.

Nelson, who was elected Varina District supervisor in 2011, is serving his first term on Henrico’s board. He said it has been an honor to represent his district for the past three years and is “now an even greater honor” to become the second African-American to serve as the board’s vice chairman.

“Now I am able to sit beside the first African-American (to hold the position),” Nelson said. “I look up to Mr. Thornton as a mentor. I know that we and our other colleagues on the board will continue to work well together.”

Nelson thanked Varina residents for the opportunity to serve on Henrico’s board.

“It was not long ago that persons who look like me were not able to vote in the United States,” he said. “I do not take this lightly that I am able to serve in this leadership capacity in this great county.”

Nelson said he is excited about the county’s prospects in 2015.

“We have a visionary, energetic county manager and a very highly qualified staff,” he said. “I am looking forward to continuing to move Henrico County forward.”

Nelson serves on a number of governmental and community organizations, including the Baptist General Convention of Virginia, the Capital Region Airport Commission, the Richmond Metropolitan Transportation Authority and the board of directors of the Virginia Commonwealth University Health System Authority.

A native of the Varina District, he earned an associate degree from J. Sargeant Reynolds Community College, a bachelor’s degree from VCU and a master’s degree from Virginia Union. Nelson is the pastor of Sixth Mount Zion Baptist Church in Richmond.

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Vice Chairman Tyrone E. Nelson