

Board Member Libby Garvey's January 6, 2021 Organizational Remarks

I congratulate Mr. De Ferranti and Ms. Cristol on becoming our Chair and Vice-Chair this year. 2021 should, hopefully, be better than 2020, but I know it will present many challenges. With you at the helm we have a great leadership team to lead us through this next year as we work to stabilize and recover.

In 2021 I plan to continue to do whatever I can to support our efforts to end systemic racism and to continue to build a more resilient Arlington. Innovation is bumpy and never easy. However, I think we've all been pleasantly surprised at how quickly and well we can innovate when we need to. I will continue to support smart innovation efforts.

I look forward to analyzing what we learned and what actually worked *better* this past pandemic year. I plan to do what I can to ensure that we keep what good changes and progress we made in response to our painful experiences in 2020.

One of the lessons I've taken away already, is how important is kindness. Where we were kind with each other and understanding of the stress everyone was under this year, things went better. When we got angry and accusatory towards each other, things usually went worse.

This brings me to a bit of a perennial theme for me and one I plan to continue this year: civility. I'll repeat myself a little here because the basic points don't change. Civility is important for civilized life. That's why civility comes from the same word as "civilization." Books on civility have been around for a long time. One from 1595 has as its first rule "Be respectful." Not subservient or always agreeing, but respectful.

I think being respectful today means treating each other like we are on the same team. We may disagree on something important, but we should respect each other even as we argue vigorously. After all, resolving different points of view often leads to better outcomes for everyone.

This past year I think we've all seen how incivility takes a toll on our democracy. It hurts those in public service and fractures communities, which is why I keep bringing it up. When I see incivility here in Arlington, it worries me. We will be facing some major issues in the next years. These include setting budget priorities as our economy struggles to recover and putting an end to systemic racism. We really cannot afford to fight among ourselves if we are going to effectively tackle these big issues.

Finally, the other issue I've been talking about for years, and plan to continue to work on, is how we support local government, especially regarding pay for elected officials. When I began my elected service, back in the 90s, it was somewhat reasonable to assume that local elected positions were part time work. But times have changed, and we need to change with them.

Let's reflect a moment on what local elected Boards and city councils do. In today's electronic age, elected members are expected to be available to their constituents pretty much 24/7 to answer emails, attend meetings and ceremonial events, analyze major land use and development issues, coordinate with regional bodies, and ultimately be responsible for large budgets in the range of hundreds of millions, or billions, of dollars. People turn to them for leadership in a crisis.

And elected officials are expected to do this work part time because they are assumed to have *another* job. If you step back and look at what our work entails today, it's totally unreasonable to treat these positions as part time. But just about every local government in Virginia runs this way, not only Arlington. However, that doesn't make it right.

My primary goal is good government. A strong democracy and government require a broad and representative pool of candidates to run for office. It's getting harder and harder for good people to run for local office. When I encourage good people to run, some say they can't take the nastiness (there is that civility issue). More say they'd love to do it but can't afford it. Over time, that's not good for democracy or for our local government. I think this year has made it really clear how important good government is at the local level. It is local governments across the country that have held this nation together over the past 4 years.

So, in 2021 I look forward to supporting our Chair in his work on equity, stabilization and recovery, as we build on some hard lessons from this year to make Arlington more equitable, more innovative and more resilient. I plan to encourage civil discourse as much as I can and do what I can to help local elected officials get the support they need to do the work we all need them to do.