

Six hundred and sixty-two days have passed since we began our emergency response to the emerging Covid-19 pandemic. Since then, we have endured multiple surges interspersed with periods of low transmission that have been both a public health and an emotional roller coaster. As we gather tonight, nearly two years later, we are experiencing record high case levels with the omicron variant that is far more transmissible than anything we have seen to date. Yet this is not 2020 all over again. Then, our goal was to do whatever we could to prevent people from *dying* from this virus; in 2022, our mission is to safely and successfully *live* with the novel coronavirus ever present in our midst. I say this not as a concession to the persistent perniciousness of COVID, but because our community rates—depending on the metric—are at or among the highest vaccination levels in the Commonwealth; because there are effective therapies treating those who become ill, and because distancing, hygiene and contact tracing protocols have proven effective in limiting spread.

I know that we are all tired of the pandemic and many are working through significant trauma caused by loss of loved ones, livelihoods, stability, and security. But our COVID fatigue must not give way to complacency. Living with COVID means maintaining our vigilance, our patience, our flexibility, and our community spirit to overcome any challenge the virus and its variants may bring. Successfully living in the COVID era also means following through with our plans and commitments to improve the quality of life for those of us who are already here and ensuring a strong foundation for those who will someday make Arlington their home. Before COVID, we laid the foundation to transform Arlington with pragmatic yet ambitious plans toward *decarbonization of our energy use*; toward providing a sufficient supply of quality housing to meet expected growth, while growing the supply of homes affordable to households earning less than the median income; and toward equipping our government with the skills to make decisions and take actions that further our commitment to racial equity.

Since we adopted the Community Energy Plan, we are two years closer to important milestone dates of 2025, 2035 and 2050, where we ultimately endeavor to reduce energy demand and have our energy use reach carbon neutrality. To meet our ambitious targets, we must prioritize taking every practical opportunity to de-intensify carbon use with our government operations, and as we develop the out years of our 10-year capital improvement plan, we should plan for sustainable products and systems even if they are not quite practical today. Specifically, I would like to see our best thinking on addressing the incentive mismatch when it comes to energy efficient durables and systems. Can the C and R Pace programs be made attractive enough to encourage sustainable building and renovation? Can we bring

end user demand for such sustainable products and systems, that are also more affordable over the long-term, to the development stage? Can we increase the use of smart systems as a key component in reducing energy demand, and can we develop innovative approaches to educate and inform stakeholders about their role in contributing to a carbon neutral Arlington? I would also like for us to continue to be aggressive with our legislative advocacy and explore how carrots like expanded tax credits and sticks like more prescriptive building codes can be added to our toolkit.

And while this work will necessarily be diffuse and pursued through many departments, we must centralize our focus to seize every opportunity and make our best decisions.

I am pleased and proud that in 2020 and 2021, Arlington has, in the face of strong headwinds, made positive strides toward our housing goals by continuing to invest in redevelopment proposals that provide moderately priced units, leveraging resources to make some of those units affordable to those earning even lower incomes, and entering partnerships that, through land use planning, will create quality new development of moderately priced housing. This year, I look forward to considering recommendations from the Missing Middle Housing Study so that we can better meet the demand for different housing types while setting standards for how that housing can enhance our neighborhoods and anchor long-term sustainability. We must continue to focus on sufficient overall supply while assessing the housing needs of demographic cohorts like older adults. Of course, there will be more for us to work on as it relates to the Barcroft Apartments community and the generational opportunity to avoid massive displacement and plan for the creation of an income diverse community that all current residents can look forward to enjoying.

There has been great work toward realizing Arlington's commitment to equity, by normalizing equity considerations and beginning to operationalize equity in the work of government. Now, I want us to take the next step and effect action throughout our community by convening and/or participating in coalitions that bring together businesses, researchers, and community organizations, among others, where we can build on our work to date of developing an understanding of why inequities persist so that we can scale up to these interested parties working toward curing the underlying disease of systemic racism.

I'm not going to predict when we'll get to our new normal, or just what our new normal will be, but I am certain that if we rely on the resilience that has been honed

during the pandemic and remain focused on achieving our goals for sustainability, housing, and equity, we will emerge on the other side, better and stronger.