

## BUILDING A RESILIENT BELOVED COMMUNITY IN TURBULENT TIMES

Happy New Year...although maybe I'm not the only one feeling like I shouldn't say that too loud and jinx anything.

First, thank you. Thank you to my Board colleagues, our outgoing chair Matt de Ferranti and our new leadership team, Katie Cristol and Christian Dorsey.

Thank you, and thank you again, to our staff and employees who have been working so hard under challenging conditions for almost 2 years now. Thank you to our residents many of whom have stepped up to help their neighbors with food, vaccinations and more. And who are smart and got vaccinated.

When I tried to distill what I want to say today, the words "beloved community" and "white water rafting" came to mind.

Martin Luther King's phrase "the beloved community" is really nice shorthand for what I think we want Arlington to be: a resilient community where everyone feels safe with true economic and social justice. Working to get to this goal has felt pretty bumpy and turbulent since 2020. We've had to adapt quickly; stay centered and balanced; and stick together. That feels like white water rafting to me. Or, to say it using some of my themes from the past: we've used equity and innovation, with a good dose of civility to try to become the resilient beloved community we want to be. But it's not been smooth.

With likely to another unsettled year of transitions ahead.... I see more white-water rapids ahead.

Sticking together and staying balanced will be crucial as change continues to be rough on everyone. Civil discourse is ever more important. I recommend again this little book George Washington's *Rules of Civility and Decent Behavior*. It's short, an interesting window on personal hygiene of the past, but also helpful with bits of advice for us today like be respectful (#1) and don't spread false rumors (#79). The last is my favorite: "Labor to keep alive in your breast that little celestial fire called conscience."

Which brings me to equity: Equity is front and center now, as it should be for any good government. It's a matter of conscience. The new wider awareness of equity and justice issues has brought us a lot of turmoil, but we are working now to infuse equity into everything we do. We're not there, but we're working on it. I look

forward to getting our Community Oversight Board up and running. I do not expect this work to be smooth, either, but it's necessary.

Housing, of course, is a major challenge for achieving equity in any attractive urban area. I was pleased, and relieved, when we partnered with Amazon to support the purchase of Barcroft Apartments. We moved really fast to do it because we had to. I'm sure there will be disagreements as we work out the details, but this is a big innovative step as we try to build the resilient and ideal "beloved community" we want.

Another challenging transition I see is economic. Teachers, nurses, police, firefighters, mental health workers, and more, all essential workers, have been on the front lines more than ever during Covid. They are tired and many are realizing they could be earning more money ...for less work ...doing something else. We are struggling, along with every other jurisdiction, to keep our employees. This year collective bargaining will change how salary negotiations happen. I think it will be rough for a while as some economic priorities and expectations change, but the people who care for our children, our sick, our elderly and those who keep us safe SHOULD get paid well and better than they often have been. That, to me, is part of equity.

To pay for the employees we need, we've got to bring down our office vacancy rate... again. That will require innovation and adapting our zoning much faster than we are used to. I'm sure there will be disagreements about how we do that, too.

Besides these big, possibly turbulent transitions, I see 2 major threats.

First, climate change. We will continue to keep adapting as fast as we can, but despite our best efforts we likely will always be behind where we want to be with stormwater capacity; renewable energy; trees and green space; transit and biking; local food production with our Friends of Urban Agriculture and our new indoor farming businesses. Arlington will not be self-sufficient with locally produced food and energy any time soon, but steps in that direction ...and to have the region move in that direction.... are crucial to our future health and resiliency in a changing climate.

Second, is the threat to our democracy. There are lots of angry people with guns in this country. We are relatively sheltered here, but some of those who attacked the Capitol last January stayed in Arlington and many drove through on their way. As we go about our work of good government here, building our beloved community and trying to keep our metaphorical raft afloat, we cannot ignore that fact. The

danger to our democracy is not a local issue, but I think it is a local threat. I'm not sure what we should do about it, but I know we and the entire region need to stay close and keep our public safety systems strong and nimble.

To end on a positive note: I think we've gotten more resilient and been doing really well, all things considered. We've developed much more flexibility in how we function. We're getting more comfortable talking about racial equity. Tempers have perhaps cooled a little leading to more civil conversations.

So, in 2022, I'll continue to use an equity focus for our decisions; to encourage innovation probably more than some people will like; and I'll encourage constructive civil discourse as much as I can.

I cannot be more grateful for my board colleagues, our fantastic staff and employees, and our residents. I wouldn't want any better raft mates for the metaphorical white-water trip we are on to a resilient beloved community that includes everyone. Thank you.