

Good Evening and Happy New Year,

This year, like last, we begin with significant challenges before us. The Omicron variant has led to a spike in infections.

Before I turn more fully to COVID and this year, I want to say how grateful I am to our community, our staff, and each of you, colleagues, for the opportunity to serve as chair last year. We met the vaccination challenge of the first 5 months, established a police community oversight board to build and strengthen trust with our community, enacted collective bargaining and prevailing wage ordinances, set up our Hunger Security Task Force, taken critical steps on our environment with respect to electric buses and vehicles, plastic bags, and leaf blowers, changed the name from Lee Highway to Langston Boulevard, changed our logo, partnered with our schools on a new home for the Arlington Community High School in the years to come, and made a historic investment in affordable housing at Barcroft. I am grateful for the chance to serve as Chair and look forward to working with you over the year to come.

Bringing down the current Omicron spike in cases and getting more Arlington residents boosted will be the most important priority of the first months. Dr. Mike Silverman, Chair of Virginia Hospital Center's Department of Emergency Medicine, closed his update last Thursday with, "The Coronavirus is not done with us yet. Get vaccinated (or your booster). Wear a Mask."

We must heed Dr. Silverman's advice. The County will work on the national problem: not enough supply of tests. We also must move our boosted rate from 34.8% to the 81.8% of adult Arlingtonians who are vaccinated with two doses. We can do this: we are at or near the top in Virginia with respect to our vaccination rates. We need to get more residents boosted. Preventing additional variants by lowering the numbers of cases will be critical. I will work to secure additional tests so that we can get better data to fight the virus and keep you safe.

As we work to respond to the impacts of the pandemic, inclusive economic growth will be essential. We must continue the call to action I put forward last year of investing in our small businesses because they are the lifeblood of our community. We also will consider the next phase of Amazon's HQ2 in the first 6 months of the year. I will consider the facts involved and the devil will be in the details. I believe we can reach an agreement that will serve our community well.

Our schools are a priority that we must address. We must provide the resources and capacity to make sure every child in Arlington receives an excellent education. We have done so on the new facility for the Arlington Community High School that will be part of the next Amazon building at Penn Place. We must partner with Arlington Public Schools this year to provide the additional resources and partnerships to help address educator compensation and the learning losses that resulted from the pandemic.

We must fight climate change with the urgency that the science demands. Our agreement in January of 2020 to purchase energy from a solar farm was a big deal that will help us reach our 2025 Community Energy Plan goals. We must come up with similarly transformational ideas over the coming year. We are making critical investments in stormwater and electric vehicles, but I will push for the transformational change we need to reach the last 15-20% of our 2025 goals and to put our community on path to reach the critical 2035 goal of 100% renewable electricity.

Last, but not least, housing and hunger, two priorities that have defined my work on the Board. Both are inextricably linked with equity—serving those most in need in our community and addressing racial injustice. I will continue to work on the conditions in affordable housing units such as those at the Serrano, a priority I worked on a lot last year and one our Chair will lead on this year. I will continue the work as we broaden and strengthen our commitment to safe, stable affordable unit

I also am looking forward to the work to come on the Barcroft Apartments. The vote we took to ensure affordability of these 1334 units last year is perhaps the most important vote I have cast on the Board. I am looking forward to the work to come to preserve these units and invest in our community.

We must also work to expand housing choices and follow through on the missing middle work we have begun. I am determined that thoughtful proposals to help make housing more affordable for those working their way up the economic ladder will come before the Board in 2022. Finally, I will be working on affordable homeownership, a priority that I am committed to finding a tangible way forward on this year.

On hunger, the Food Security Task Force is working with the Urban Institute on a study that will help show the scope of the challenge we face. I will work with staff and colleagues on how we can address the problem using the data and information we learn in that study.

I am eager to dig in and get to work. Our residents deserve nothing less. There's much to do in 2022!