

Takis - 2022 Organizational Meeting Remarks

Dear Arlingtonians, Madam Chair, dear Colleagues,

As 2021 came to an end, I had the impression that it felt strangely short. Sometimes I thought '21 was nothing else but an extension of 2020.

I blame the pandemic for that impression but also the fast, seemingly never-ending, succession of events that make time feel shorter and more compressed.

It feels like yesterday when a violent insurrection threatened our Democracy. I will never forget that Arlington's law-enforcement officers stood in the first line of defense not only on the US Capitol but on our Congress, our Government, and our Constitution.

It also feels like yesterday when we ramped up our vaccination efforts, once federal vaccine supply issues were resolved, hitting the mark of being among the highest vaccinated communities in the Commonwealth and in the Nation. And again, our Public Health workers, our officials, and County employees stood in the first line of defense of our health, schools, economy, and communities. This, I will never forget and will always be grateful for their service.

2020 posed fundamental questions to our society and our government. 2021 was a year defined by responding to these questions.

Such responses were, to name a few examples:

- the institution of a Policing Community Oversight Board,
- collective bargaining rights for public employees,
- prevailing wage requirements for public Contractors,
- landmark and, therefore courageous, decisions to preserve affordable housing (e.g. Barcroft or Park Shirlington)
- continuous, equity-focused social safety-net interventions with our most vulnerable Arlingtonians to provide essential from food and rental assistance to public broadband and financial support for our small businesses.

What connects every single item in your local government's long list of accomplishments in 2021 is its focus on Arlington values: Equity, inclusion, compassion, and solidarity.

Focus on Arlington values does not mean that there are no differences of opinion. It means that there is always common ground that what unites us is always more powerful than what potentially divides us.

This is the spirit that underpins my deep appreciation for Matt de Ferranti's chairmanship and Katie Cristol's vice-chairmanship in 2021. The same appreciation extends to all my Colleagues on this Board, County Manager Mark Schwartz and his team, Kendra Jacobs, our County Board Clerk, and her team and all our civic institutions, and the countless volunteers and civic-minded

Arlingtonians who are involved and whose involvement is an essential part of our community fabric.

Searching for a “keyword” for 2021, I came up with an adjective: “systemic”. In 2022 I believe that we can build upon this. I feel that the appropriate “keyword” will be “strategic”.

This is what “strategic” means for me in 2022 and how its keyword will guide my focus:

1. While our pandemic response is now a “mature operation”, I will continue to focus on improving and refining the equitable delivery of public health and social safety net services to those who continue to lack access. This is fundamental today and for our future, post COVID-19
2. I will continue to focus on fiscally sound, sustainable, and accountable governance. I look forward to my 2nd year co-chairing our County’s audit committee. I plan to engage with the challenges presented by a changing local economy that is still marked by high office vacancy rates and uncertainty.
 - Most importantly, I look forward to creating a long-term support framework for small businesses in Arlington, including technical and financial assistance.
3. I will continue to focus on Environmental Sustainability with a goal to enable us to become more than just a “responsible community”. More means: being a leader. Climate emergency response is not an option anymore. What is an option, is whether we want to lead with innovative and courageous solutions or not. I believe that we have everything it takes to be leaders and we have great opportunities to take action in 2022:
 - Making significant progress in the electrification and design of new buildings and leading by example when these are public projects.
 - Supporting public transit and making measurable progress on walking and cycling infrastructure.
 - Enhancing our tree canopy, and introducing meaningful protections for natural resources, including mature trees.
4. I will further continue to focus on what arguably is Arlington’s most challenging problem: Housing.
 - Housing Affordability is a strategic challenge. The size of the intervention needed to preserve the Barcroft Apartments or Park Shirlington indeed demonstrates the commitment of this Board but also indicates the order of magnitude of the challenge.
 - This year’s major planning processes invite our community to weigh in on planning and zoning decisions that will define Arlington and who can live with us, for decades to come.

I commit to approaching these discussions with an open mind but with firm values and a vision of Arlington, as an open, inclusive, equitable, fair, and forward-thinking place for ALL, present and future Arlingtonians.

Wishing all Arlingtonians a healthy, happy, and productive new year, I look forward to the progress we will make together in 2022 and to seeing you as soon as possible in your neighborhood.