

Happy New Year! 2023  
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A big thank you to Katie Cristol for her fine leadership last year (it's not easy being Chair) and congratulations and thank you to our new Chair, Christian Dorsey. Clearly, 2023 will be a transition year with you both leaving at the end. At least this outstanding Board team has one more year together.

This year we continue to be blessed with great staff without whom nothing would get done, and we are blessed with a great community to work with, despite divisions and disagreements at times.

Christian, I am so glad you continue to emphasize Equity which began with your last chairmanship. 4 years of persistent focus is paying off. It's so rewarding to see the strides we have made.

The Community Oversight Board is up and running. We have a new, less subjective way to support our non-profits. We have begun a long needed "whole of government approach" to address the many effects of discrimination in the Arlington View neighborhood and more.

Our Equity work is not done, of course, but we are starting to see real change that bodes well for the future.

As always, we face challenges this year. A new one is the changing nature of work. The move away from office to virtual work is major, but I think the bigger change may be reassessing the value of essential jobs: work like that of nurses, teachers, child care workers, public safety, mental health workers, water and sewer workers, just to name some.

These jobs provide essential services. But they usually don't pay all that much, are difficult and can even be dangerous. I think employers everywhere will need to better reward essential work if we want people to take the jobs that create and maintain our quality of life. The changing nature of work will play out in our budget this year and for years to come.

Our major local challenge at the moment is Missing Middle of course. It has divided Arlington and upset more people than any other issue I've worked on....and I've worked on some very divisive issues.

I see a number of reasons for this. For one, Arlington is rather schizophrenic with both suburban and urban personalities. Marriages of opposites can do quite well, but they are not easy and require good communication. I appreciate our Chairman's call for more respectful dialog and real listening. In my 26 years in elected office, the need for better communication and engaging all stakeholders has been a constant. We keep trying, and we keep using more new methods while keeping the old ones. We get better, but it's just hard.

Think about the simple phrase "I love Arlington." One person says that and is thinking of our quiet leafy neighborhoods with houses far apart. Another says the same thing, but means the lively, vibrant and noisy urban corridors. They use the same words, but they mean very different things.

To those differing views expressed with the exact same words, throw in the nature of people to hear what they *expect* to hear rather than what is actually said. Add to that our own government tendency to respond with more and more information, which makes it harder for a clear message to come through. Top it all off with the current climate where opponents like to demonize each other and catastrophize outcomes. Then bake it in a social media stew where misinformation, rumors and fears fly through a community. You have a recipe for .....real communication trouble.

A silver lining to all this is that we have turned more to personal conversations and meetings with small groups of people. During 2022, it's been a pleasure for me personally to connect and reconnect with so many people in these discussions, where we could talk more with each other than at each other.

Often, however, I found the discussions were not really about whether Missing Middle zoning is good as a strategy, but were actually about whether the goal of Missing Middle is good. There were lots of arguments about what that goal actually is and, once assumptions were made (which often were different), if it is a good goal.

With Missing Middle we have been wrestling with what our vision is for the future of Arlington...by arguing about how to get there.

As I see it, Missing Middle has forced us to begin the strategic plan discussion that has been avoided for years. With MM we have begun to talk more explicitly about the kind of Arlington we want. Many say they want what they have now, and that's understandable. Overall, Arlington is a great place to live, work and play. But staying the same, of course, is not an option.

It has been said that if you want to go fast, go by yourself. If you want to go far, go with a lot of people. We want Arlington to go far, to always be an attractive place to live, work and play for many different kinds of people. To do that I think we need to build more of a consensus on what that actually means and then how to get there.

That will take time and some resources, but it is an investment I think we need to make. As Yogi Berra said, "If you don't know where you are going, you won't get there."

I am not suggesting that we have no idea where we are going. We do. We have lots of master plans and policies, but probably too many to provide our residents a clear vision for Arlington's future. We certainly do not have community consensus on what that future should be. Missing Middle is making our lack of consensus quite clear.

I also am not suggesting we stop everything and do a strategic plan before adopting Missing Middle zoning. We need to get started on more flexible zoning... but in a way that relieves the fears of dire consequences that concern so many. Over time, many adjustments can be made as we clarify our vision for Arlington's future and use zoning changes to help us get there.

I *am* suggesting we spend some time in 2023 looking at the big challenges we likely will face in the next several decades; discussing where we want to be after those decades; and how we will get there. Discussions might be difficult as different visions and their trade-offs become explicit. There never will be complete consensus. But I think our discussions would be more productive if we are clear about what are the goals and what are the strategies.

Of course, this is just my view and I do not set the Board agenda. But if my colleagues and our residents think this is a worthwhile endeavor, we might at least start to think about a process for these more explicit discussions about what we want Arlington to be in a few decades and how we get there.

So, lots of good work to do, lots of blessings, and lots of important conversations to be had in 2023. I look forward to it and wish everyone a happy and healthy new year.