

Maureen Coffey 2024 New Year's Remarks

Well, hello, everyone!

Happy 2024. The New Year is a time of both reflection as well as resolution. As I reflected and started preparing for this meeting, I feel so much gratitude: to my fellow board members, those here on the dais with me and those who have come before; our staff; those of you who chose to join us this evening; and of course, more broadly, for the community that we are all so lucky to call home.

My reflections got me thinking about the values that, alongside gratitude, guide me and my thinking. Empathy. Care and kindness. Community. Equity and justice.

And so I want to use these to set some intentions or resolutions – not just for 2024, but for my time as a board member:

- I want to listen with empathy, seeking to understand the many perspectives and lived experiences across Arlington;
- To ensure we take care of those who need us, and especially when difficult choices need to be made, and remember those who are on the receiving end of our decisions; and
- To regularly consider who is and who is not part of each conversation, and actively work to bring in more voices.

With these intentions in mind, we have a lot of specific issues to tackle this year!

Livability is front of mind for so many in Arlington, encompassing both the cost and quality of life. People in Arlington are surviving, not thriving, in so many cases.

- Housing affordability and access – whether renting or owning – feels exhaustingly and impossibly stressful for so many who live here. Costs continue to go up, and inventory remains low relative to demand. We need to make investments both in proper noun Affordable Housing but also more broadly in housing affordability across the spectrum.
- Child care availability and costs are a pervasive issue. The 2018 child care initiative has had substantial impacts to help improve our number of slots, but as I'm at that fun point in life where so many of my friends are starting to have children, I have a front-row seat to what it costs in our community. Folks are getting on waitlists when they are just barely pregnant, competing for the chance to pay thousands of dollars – often thousands each month – for a safe, quality place for their child to go. That is not realistic for many families, and it has real impacts. Women bear the brunt of the responsibility for care, and low-income children lose out on critical opportunities for learning and development. The vast majority of the learning gap comes from what happens from birth to five – meaning a lack of early care and education opportunities impacts children for the rest of their schooling careers and their lives.
- Transportation is another basic building block of our lives. Metro is running more trains more frequently than it has in years! But, the world continues to change and challenge us. Funding public transit is both an economic and environmental imperative.

- We will need to do more to address our commercial real estate market. I'm grateful for the work that has been done already, and am excited about really pushing forward the Commercial Market Resiliency Initiative 2.0. Arlington has so much to offer, but the world has changed permanently over the last few years, and we need an economic development strategy that moves us forward.
- Climate change is an ever-urgent crisis. We are lucky here in Arlington to see this as a shared priority, not just one policy area but truly integrated across everything we do. I look forward to continuing toward our goal of a carbon-neutral community by 2050.
- And lastly, I think we really need to make progress on better public engagement. That doesn't just mean more quantity, though that may help in some cases. We need to be intentional and strategic. We need to build systems that have no wrong door for getting involved and that encourage participation.

As our Chair has mentioned, this year will involve much thinking about our collective future. This is important work to create the community we want together. I see this as an opportunity to be proactive in combining all of the many different priorities we have. In the short run, most things are fixed and difficult to change. When we think further out, we have the opportunity to dream a little bit bigger – and, hopefully, follow that up with a blueprint of how we build that dream.

I'm really looking forward to doing this work with all of you. Happy New Year!