

Happy New Year,

Last year, I began my remarks by focusing on the urgency I felt to prioritize what mattered most in our community in light of being a new dad. This year, my daughter remains a joy and source of motivation. I am also mindful that all Arlingtonians have major life events happening. I commit to doing my best to serve you.

Here's what I want to spend that time on in 2025.

First, we must serve the ideals at the heart of Arlington well. That means economic opportunity, compassion, inclusivity, and fairness. It also means, as you have said, Mr. Spain, being committed to both equity and to One Arlington. I look forward to working with you.

Serving Arlington's ideals also means addressing the very real worries and concerns of our friends, families, and neighbors regarding the incoming administration. Four years ago, on January 6th, 2021, as Chair of the County Board I ordered a curfew to protect Arlington. Yesterday, the Vice President certified the results of the election without delay. We must act with the integrity exhibited yesterday to preserve our democratic process.

Specifically, we should do all we can as local government to protect our residents from federal actions inconsistent with our ideals. When we hit our limits, which as a local government we may, we will work with state or federal partners to ensure our community's voices are heard and lives are respected.

Second, through mid-April, 2025, we will be working on a difficult budget. Later in January, we will find out if the decrease in the value of our office property base will lead to the County Manager's projection of a \$30 to \$40 million deficit. Like last year, our tax base is more office than any other in Virginia, so our budget challenge will be more acute than other localities.

What's different about this year? Our staff has provided us with evidence that office valuations are down more than 10%. These estimates are more specific than last year. Further, in 2024 new construction based on a few companies helped our property tax revenues. That is not likely to be the case in 2025.

Finally, our public safety employees are critical to our community. The Manager has engaged in conversations for ongoing funding to address the needs of our police, fire, and Sheriff's office—I align with the commitment to do all we can while balancing our competing priorities.

As we consider this year's difficult budget, I commit to prioritizing the services and investments we need the most, to considering our equity resolution as we make decisions, and to being fiscally responsible.

Third, the policies I will focus on this year: our economy, housing, our schools and young people, climate, hunger, transportation, and equity.

- **On Our Economy**, our office vacancy rate is as high as it has been in decades due to the paradigm shift of working from home. We must invest our time and energy in the structural changes we need. We have an extraordinary workforce, the structural advantages of Fuse at Mason Square, Amazon, tourism, and being a great place to live. We must use these advantages and make the hard choices to evolve economically.
- **On housing**, homeless services and homeownership are my specific priorities. That means prioritizing homeless services and eviction prevention in our budget. I look forward to working with my colleagues to make progress on homeownership. I also look forward to working with you, Ms. Cunningham, to pick up where we left off last year on eviction prevention.
- **On schools and our young people**, our schools continue to have a structural budget deficit. I am committed to working with our School Board and Superintendent as well as our Manager and the County Board to address that deficit. On after school programs, last year I fought for ongoing and one-time funding. This year, I commit to working with our advocates and our staff to systematize the work. To be clear, I do not see this as a pilot, but a permanent line of work.
- **On climate**, I thank the Manager for making changes in 2024 to position us to move forward this year. I remain committed to transitioning to electric buses. I also will engage in outreach to our residents and our faith

community to do climate work locally, because local work will be the primary source of the change we need.

- **On hunger**, AFAC has reported skyrocketing need. We must address this past year's spike and continue to build the infrastructure to better address hunger.
- **On transportation**, I am grateful to serve on DMV Moves, a regional group that several on the Board, including Mr. Karantonis, helped me join. We face a deficit in Metro funding in Fiscal Year 2027 that is existential. I plan on helping meet this challenge.
- **On equity**, I remain fully committed to building a more equitable Arlington. That will mean working through the Community Criminal Justice Board on the interception points where we can appropriately divert people from jail and better address our mental health and substance abuse challenges. It will also mean a focus on digital equity, childcare with you, Ms. Coffey, and on consumer protection through towing policies that serve our residents and local businesses equitably.

Finally, to best serve our community over the years ahead, I believe we should engage in a conversation and ultimately a County Board directed, citizen-led commission on how we should best be governed. Speaking for myself as one member of the Board, we would benefit from analyzing what has worked and what will serve us best going forward.

The time we have and the opportunity to serve you is precious. I commit to working with the urgency you deserve.