

## **Takis Karantonis January 4, 2021 Organizational Meeting Remarks**

Dear Arlingtonians, Mr. Chairman, and Colleagues:

2020 was indeed an exceptionally challenging year for all. A previously unknown health threat has radically impacted our lives. In a matter of weeks, normal daily behavior became a deadly risk.

2020 was before anything else, a year of human loss. We mourn the loss of more than 180 Arlingtonians in this pandemic. The same applies to the countless others who have been hospitalized; many of whom may have to deal with long-term health consequences.

I join my colleagues in thanking the heroes of 2020: Frontline workers, from the healthcare professionals to the first responders and the grocery store clerks – all who worked tirelessly, selflessly and mostly invisibly so that we, as a society, enter this New Year with hope that an end is in sight.

I also want to especially thank the vast majority of residents who understood the challenge and demonstrated unprecedented discipline and civic responsibility in doing the right thing every day: staying home, washing hands, wearing masks, and social distancing. And all this at the same time, managing the impact of the pandemic on their own lives and families.

Long before a vaccine was available, you, the members of our community, have been our most effective tool to contain the virus, reduce its impact and bring this pandemic to an end. We stay united as a community and with your help we will beat COVID-19, we will return to work, we will safely open schools, restart our economy and we will be able to meet without fear once again.

I want to publicly thank my colleagues and particularly, our immediate past chair Libby Garvey and Chairman Matt de Ferranti as well as County Manager Mark Schwartz and the County Manager's Office as well as Kendra Jacobs, our County Board Clerk and the County Board Office for providing me with invaluable assistance and helping me to hit the ground running after being elected to the County Board.

Earlier this year we lost a dear friend, community leader, and County Board Member, Erik Gutshall. In his first full address on this Board in January 2019, Erik talked about our dreams as a community and how to overcome our fears together. His presence will always be felt, and his message will help guide us as we address these systemic challenges. From Erik, I learned that leadership is not only about responding to the

immediate needs, but also about “focusing on the future” and building strong, “systemic” foundations that will carry and sustain our community beyond any current crisis.

“Systemic” would be a key word for this past year, and a core reason why COVID -19 could have such a negative impact; the accumulation of deficiencies and inequalities. ‘Systemic’ is inequitable access to health, social services, food, housing, unemployment benefits and economic opportunity; all compounded by racial injustice. ‘Systemic’ is also being strategic in our response to the Climate Crisis, protecting our natural resources, and supporting our local small business economy.

Thus, as we respond to the COVID-19 crisis, in 2021, I plan to focus:

- On fiscally sound, sustainable and accountable governance. This is a challenging year where all our fiscal priorities will have to be carefully re-examined and contrasted against major challenges in the commercial tax-base, the pressing priority of rescuing Metro, the not less pressing need to continue funding and supporting our School System and the need to continue providing effective social safety net services to vulnerable Arlingtonians - People first! -
- I will continue to work, with ‘Electrifying Energy’ on advancing the County’s sustainability goals by working to put in place a strong Community Energy Plan Implementation Framework - and, I should mention, an equally significant and consequential update of our Forestry and Natural Resources Masterplan.
- I will actively support our efforts to find new and creative approaches to Housing affordability by adding more and more effective tools in our policy toolbox - such as the missing middle study-, that offers a pathway to increase housing supply at different price points for all Arlingtonians.
- I will further focus on key ‘systemic’ elements of our economic recovery, such as
  - pursuing a new, and long-term effective framework of support for the backbone of our local economy, our small Businesses.
  - delivering social as well as economic essential infrastructure, such as affordable broadband access to the individuals and businesses.
  - A mutually beneficial partnership with our public employees as we will engage in collective bargaining for the first time this year.
- And last but never least, I will continue to focus on working with all of you to digest the lessons of our extensive work on racial equity and transform them into actionable steps forward. From reevaluating our policing practices, to making public participation accessible at all levels: these conversations will continue in 2021. I look forward to the progress we will make together.

The face of hope this past year is the joyous expression of the first people who received the COVID-19 vaccine. As we overcome challenges together in 2021 and beyond, we

can share the optimistic expression of this accomplishment of science, perseverance and a commitment to a common cause.

A safe, healthy and happy New Year !