

Board Member Christian Dorsey's Jan. 4, 2021 Organizational Meeting Remarks

I congratulate our new leadership team, Chair De Ferranti and Vice Chair Cristol, and thank you for leading this Board for the 2021 year. And thank you, Ms. Garvey, our outgoing Chair, for so steadily leading us through the 2020 experience.

An experience that challenged us in so many ways yet was met by a level of excellence from our staff in navigating challenging circumstances. The list of individuals meriting recognition is extensive and includes our County Manager. So, Mr. Schwartz, please accept my gratitude to you and our staff for your outstanding work over this past year.

2020 dealt an unanticipated and devastating blow to us all, and I so appreciate the many members of our community who adapted to our changing circumstances, showed resilience in the face of ongoing crisis and demonstrated grace and goodwill in working to keep themselves and others healthy and secure.

The traditional tenor of these first of the year remarks—where we look out over the horizon of the entire year—is difficult for me given 2020, when our vision narrowed to week-to-week and sometimes day-to-day. For the foreseeable future we will be well-served to continue that approach as we manage a pandemic where cases and case rates are too high, and the number of COVID hospitalizations is concerning. The salutary effects of what may end up being several approved vaccines bring along the need to coordinate the safe, equitable and widespread distribution of them to our community. The public health imperative to continue restrictions to the way we engage in commerce and community will deepen the economic insecurity many are experiencing.

And though herd immunity to COVID-19 may mark the end of the devastation, it will also serve as the beginning of our imperative to repair the damage to the security and stability of our residents and businesses.

How we do that is not certain at this point, but I draw optimism from the 2020 experience when:

- Community groups and organizations, our Public Schools and Government came together to provide food to those who would have otherwise gone hungry.
- Multiple solutions were deployed to extend quality broadband so that our children could participate in distance learning.
- Innovative programs were developed to support our service businesses in maintaining operations amid occupancy restrictions, and
- The necessary services and functions of local government were maintained through the kind of innovation and creativity that, in some cases, saw better service delivery than ever before.

These experiences give me confidence that Arlington has the stuff to tackle whatever we are required to adapt to over this year and to repair the frayed fabric of our society so that we emerge even stronger.

One way we are growing stronger is by walking toward racial justice and equity.

Well before our nation reckoned with state and civilian violence against non-combatative African Americans, our community began the work of confronting systemic racism by starting the process of building structural equity. We should and must be held accountable for building upon the work of normalizing the concepts of race and equity and deepening our analyses of who benefits and who is burdened by our actions—even when doing so requires grappling with data that offer inconvenient truths such as those who are the subject of complaints to authorities.

I challenge us to confront the practices around complaint-based enforcement. While we have a natural and commendable desire to be responsive to those who are vocal, our response should not be at the expense of those who are silent. I believe we must thoughtfully reform systems so that government's power to be punitive is not brought to bear on individuals when complainants are acting upon animus, implicit bias or narrow perspectives.

I recognize this is difficult because I believe that our community is healthier when we all take responsibility to say something when we see something.

Yet I also believe that safety and security are false virtues when coming at the expense of one's human or civil rights.

So, I hope we can begin a process for our community to better understand what constitutes suspicious and offending behavior and activity and that our enforcement promotes compliance and when punitive measures are necessary, that they are scaled to the magnitude of the problem.

Let's continue to keep one another safe and understand our collective agency in tackling the work and meeting the challenges that lie ahead.