

**Statement of Jay Fisette
Arlington County Board
January 1, 2013 Organizational Meeting**

Good morning everyone. I first want to thank Ms. Hynes for her excellent stewardship of this community as our Chairman in 2012. And to our new Chairman, Mr. Tejada, a hearty congratulations.

I support your plans for tangible progress in affordable housing, fitness & health, urban agriculture, and pedestrian & bike safety...for all of Arlington. I look forward to working closely with you, and our colleagues, this year.

I also want to thank each of you who is here today, whether an active community member or a dedicated staff member, for all that you do to contribute to making Arlington the wonderful community that it is.

I cannot help but put my reflections and aspirations for our community in the context of the evolving dysfunction of the federal government. I believe government, at all levels, has the potential to play a constructive and important role in the lives of its people and communities. The self-contrived crisis across the river is a case study of unhealthy leadership and misguided values. We live in the shadows of this drama, and we, along with American communities across the country, continue to be directly affected.

If Washington worked according to Arlington's vision statement, our values and our long-standing collaborative decision making process – the problem would be quickly resolved.

Why is that? I believe it is because we balance a strong heart with a sound mind. We have a vision that proudly states our commitment to inclusion and to the importance of each Arlingtonian, AND we have conservative fiscal policies that guide our expenditures and investments. We must balance our budget every year. We have resources AND we leverage those resources to get the maximum value. We provide a safety net AND we encourage individual responsibility. We look at the long term implications of our decisions - not just the short term - AND we make investments accordingly.

Last January, I reported that Arlington had sold bonds at a 3.3% interest rate in 2011. In 2012, we sold bonds that carried only a 2.77% interest rate, and we refunded bonds at an amazing 2.15% rate of interest. This refunding alone saved Arlington about \$9 million.

Our budgeting, purchasing and finance systems are a fundamental tenet of our success. Our triple-AAA bond rating was reaffirmed, with Moody's stating it reflects "strong long-term credit characteristics including a sizeable and affluent tax base, stable and carefully-managed financial operations with sound reserves,

and moderate debt position with reasonable borrowing needs.” We shall do nothing to threaten our bond rating.

Another key factor in the health of our community is that we value both the ends and the means. Citizen engagement and participation is an Arlington tradition. A healthy community is one in which each person has an ability to influence and shape the decisions of their government and no single person has the ability to sidetrack a decision. A good idea is a good idea, regardless of the source. Striving toward consensus is not confused with unanimity. And when we disagree, we do so respectfully.

It was respectful citizen input and creativity that led to the renovation and reopening of the Lubber Run Amphitheatre and Gulf Branch Nature Center, creation of the Westover Farmer’s Market, and of the future homeless services center. Value-added partnerships exist with our business improvement districts and our many non-profit organizations.

As we witness the goings-on across the river, and as we confront the real economic and environmental challenges ahead, I am motivated to recommit to our own Arlington values and principles. Our 89% overall satisfaction with the quality of services in Arlington would seem to suggest there is virtually nowhere to go but down, but we must challenge ourselves to find new and improved ways of moving forward and making Arlington even better.

I am particularly interested in furthering Arlington’s environmental sustainability. In 2011, the recommendations of the Community Energy and Sustainability Task Force received unanimous support from Task Force members and from the Board. In 2012, with the continued help of many business leaders, energy industry experts, citizens, Arlington Public Schools and others, the County Manager proposed a final Community Energy Plan and an Implementation Framework.

In 2013 I will work for adoption of the Community Energy Plan to ensure our economic competitiveness, energy security and to protect the environment.

While we implement this big plan, I will also begin a personal crusade to reduce the use of plastic water bottles. In 2009, the Board passed a resolution banning the use of taxpayer funds to purchase single use bottled water – with a very few exceptions. That resolution spoke to the environmental cost of producing, transporting and disposing of these bottles. Some current facts on plastic water bottles:

- 1500 bottles are used per second in the US, 50 billion a year
- 17 million barrels of oil are used to produce bottled water each year
- Cost of a bottle of water is over 1000 x the cost of tap water
- Annual cost of 8 glasses of water a day: \$.49 with tap vs \$1400 bottled

- Bottled water is 2-4 times the cost of gasoline
- 80% is thrown away (where is “away”), ends up in garbage
- It takes 700 years for bottles to start to decompose
- Ecosystems and wildlife are damaged/destroyed by plastic debris

The evil twin is plastic bags, currently estimated at 500 billion used per year, with many of the same impacts. Watch the movie Bag It, and you will do as I have, and personally commit to never buy another single use plastic water bottle again.

In sum, we've got a good thing going. We have the lowest unemployment rate in Virginia, our public schools are outstanding, crime rates are low and the Arlington County Fair is still free. Our parks, trails and cultural resources are plentiful. You are our most valuable asset. Our vision is sound. Together we can meet our greatest challenges.

Happy New Year!