

Chairman J. Walter Tejada Remarks January 1, 2013

Welcome

Good morning! ¡*Buenos días a todos y Feliz Año Nuevo!* Happy New Year, everybody! Thank you all for joining us today for this unique Arlington tradition of rolling up our sleeves and getting to work on the very first day of the New Year.

I want to start with a heartfelt thank you to Mary Hynes for her hard work as Chair this past year. Under her leadership in 2012, this Board and this County accomplished much for our community. Mrs. Hynes championed civic engagement and investing in capital maintenance, and led us to many successes during her first term as Chair.

I also want to thank all of my colleagues for once again giving me the honor of serving as your Chairman. We have many challenges ahead of us, and I look forward to working with each of you to meet those challenges.

And I want to thank Arlingtonians for being involved and committed to our community. Thank you for actively participating in our civic life and contributing so much to our County. You are the reason Arlington is a great place to live.

My thanks also to our County Manager and our dedicated County staff – all those hard-working people who come to work every day determined to make a difference. I believe that Arlington has some of the finest public servants in the nation, and I thank you for your service.

Our Community in 2013

Those who have met me know that I am passionate about our community. Call me biased, but I believe that Arlington is a very special place.

The heart of Arlington is our community, our inclusion, diversity, mutual respect and sustainability. So many in our community -- including my colleagues past and present -- are working to ensure Arlington continues to be a great place to live, visit, work, play and do business.

Arlington is in many ways a fortunate community. Our public schools are among the finest in the nation. Our property values remain strong and our commercial and retail sectors are healthy. Our community is safe. We provide residents with high-quality services and a strong safety net to care for those who are most vulnerable. We are one of the rare triple-triple-A-rated communities in the nation, a rating that this County has earned for 12 straight years.

But we must not be complacent. As our nation continues to recover from the worst recession in generations, Arlington faces economic uncertainty. Office vacancies are rising as the federal government makes cutbacks and the BRAC (Base Realignment and Closure) process is fully implemented. We face a gap in our Fiscal Year 2014 budget that will force us to make tough choices. To cope, we must continue the strong financial management that has served Arlington well for so many years. We must be creative and flexible, and ensure that Arlington remains a great place to do business.

Our County has enjoyed the lowest unemployment rate in the Commonwealth for several years, and we must do everything possible to continue creating the climate for such success. To remain competitive, we must keep our tax rates fair. We must make wise strategic choices in our Capital Improvement Program to ensure that we invest appropriately in infrastructure, yet keep the growth of debt manageable. We must continue to provide our taxpayers with good value, and to work with businesses, large and small, that bring so much to our community.

These are some of the crucial fundamentals that help Arlington remain one of the most successful Counties in the nation. Yes, Arlington is an excellent place to live, visit, work, play, and do business – and so the question for us is: how can we make it even better ... *for all of Arlington?*

As we Move Forward Together – *Juntos Hacia Adelante* – we must do so *for all of Arlington*.

2013: Moving Forward Together

Throughout 2013, my central themes will be diversity, sustainability, health, and inclusion ... *for all of Arlington*.

Here is how I propose we go about making a great community even better: This year, I intend to focus on the following four areas:

- Affordable Housing
- Fitness and Health
- Urban Agriculture, and
- Pedestrian and Bicycle Safety

I believe that these issues are related and that together, they go to the heart of what Arlington is all about – community, inclusion, diversity, mutual respect and sustainability ... *for all of Arlington*.

They are all about Moving Forward Together – *Juntos Hacia Adelante*. My 2013 agenda seeks tangible accomplishments in each of these areas:

Affordable Housing:

No community in this region has invested more or worked harder to preserve affordable housing than Arlington. By working together and investing local, state and federal funds wisely, we have created 6,585 committed affordable units – housing that will remain affordable to low- and medium-income Arlingtonians for decades.

And yet we must do more.

Our success means that development pressures will continue to increase. Already on Columbia Pike, market forces are threatening one of the County's largest supplies of market-rate affordable housing. This is why the Board in 2012 adopted the Columbia Pike Neighborhoods Plan, the County's most ambitious blueprint for preserving affordable housing. The plan commits Arlington to preserving 100% of the existing affordable housing along the Pike.

I am determined that we will keep that commitment, and that as the Pike becomes an even more attractive place to live, work and play, Columbia Pike's vibrant, diverse neighborhoods will be preserved.

Under the Columbia Pike Neighborhoods Plan, we are looking at new ways to finance more affordable housing. I have asked the Manager to analyze and submit a recommendation by June 2013 for creating a transit oriented affordable housing fund on Columbia Pike through adoption of a TIF, Tax Increment Financing. This type of fund could make it possible for the County to use a portion of any increase in assessed values of property on the Pike to help fund affordable housing. With county-government assistance, I am also determined to find ways to help small businesses on the Pike stay and share in the prosperity of transit-oriented development.

In addition, I will continue to strongly advocate for an increased investment in affordable housing. We need this to house our healthcare workers and teacher aides, our cashiers and restaurant workers, our cleaning staff and small business employees, and other hard-working people so vital to our County's economic health. We need it to maintain the cultural and economic diversity that is so vital to Arlington's soul ... *for all of Arlington.*

There is a wonderful quote from John F. Kennedy:

"To those whom much is given, much is expected."

In Arlington, we are fortunate, and we have indeed been given much. Our vision statement expresses our values by stating clearly that "each person is important."

Therefore, we must do more.

We must do more to end homelessness in our community. As co-chair of the workgroup, I will focus this year on advancing our 10-Year Plan to End Homelessness. Our plan's goal is to ensure that no individual or family lack access to decent, affordable housing. Our approach is based on the best practice of "housing first," which focuses on preventing homelessness, moving people who do become homeless into housing rapidly, and providing the wrap-around services they need to maintain their housing.

That is why I am proud that this year we will start construction on a new comprehensive homeless services center that will help provide these services and set people on the path toward housing and toward rebuilding their lives.

And this year we will issue a **call to action** to our business community, and to all Arlingtonians, as we continue our series of Informational Outreach Forums to help everyone understand the issues and solutions to homelessness. We need your participation in this important work.

Fitness and Health:

Anyone who knows me knows that I think we should do whatever we can to promote healthy living ... *for all of Arlington.*

Arlington already offers residents and visitors of all levels and abilities a wide array of options for staying fit and healthy. We offer 36 miles of multi-use trails and 50 miles of connecting bike routes. We offer 149 County parks, three regional parks, 130 athletic fields including 10 synthetic fields, and 118 tennis and basketball courts. We offer a huge variety of sports and recreational programming through our Department of Parks and Recreation. And of course, our transit-oriented development has created our walkable, bikeable urban villages.

And yet we must do more.

Recent research shows that being more intentional about physical activity improves health and fitness.

In 2013, we will get Arlington active through our FitArlington initiative – a broad effort to get everyone moving. This is another way in which we will Move Forward Together – *Juntos Hacia Adelante.*

Throughout 2013 we will be working with our FitArlington partners on ways to bring movement, physical activity, and *fun* to our community.

We will also bring particular attention to the **prevention of childhood obesity.**

We will form the Arlington Healthy Community Action Team (HCAT), a coalition of Arlington health and fitness providers, youth services providers, nutrition

educators, and urban agriculture enthusiasts. Throughout the year, you will see the team working on many activities to help reduce childhood obesity.

We will partner with Arlington Public Schools to increase healthy foods for pre-schoolers and to increase movement and physical activity for children at recess, in after-school programs and in after-school activities.

We are kicking off the initiative to reduce childhood obesity on Thursday, January 17, 9:30-11:30 a.m. at the Fairlington Community Center – I hope you will join us.

Furthermore, we look forward to breaking ground this fall for the Aquatics and Fitness Facility at Long Bridge Park. This will be another great Arlington asset to help keep us moving forward, fit and healthy.

Urban Agriculture:

Of course, a critical element of fitness and health is what we eat – healthy food is needed for healthy bodies. How we grow, transport, access, buy, prepare and dispose of our food is very much on our minds here in Arlington.

A year ago today, my colleague Jay Fiset and I announced the kick-off of our Urban Agriculture initiative. In the past year, the Urban Agriculture Task Force has been hard at work on a Food Action Plan for Arlington, an inventory of current practices, and recommendations for moving forward.

Task Force members are addressing planning, growing, storing and sharing of food resources, as well as waste recycling. Sometime this spring, we expect the task force to bring its recommendations to the County Board. I look forward to receiving those recommendations and helping lead the way on urban agriculture ... *for all of Arlington.*

Pedestrian and Bicycle Safety:

With our transit-oriented development – our smart growth philosophy – Arlington is the envy of many communities who would love to have the same walking and biking opportunities. Every day, I see many people out and about – walking to school, taking the bus to work, using their bikes for errands or recreation.

And yet we must do more.

As we move around Arlington, it is important that we do so safely. Whether you are walking, cycling or driving, it's important for everyone to respect each other's rights and space. A little courtesy will help everybody reach their destination safely.

This year I will actively promote a safety campaign for drivers, pedestrians and bicyclists – Share Our Streets, Be a PAL – *Compartamos Nuestras Calles, Seamos Amables.*

This campaign builds on the County's successful PAL campaign – the way we Share Our Streets is to be a PAL -- Predictable, Alert, Lawful. We all must Share Our Streets, whether driving, biking or walking. Throughout the year, we will focus on this safety campaign.

As part of the campaign, we will create more bike lanes, add more bicycle and pedestrian way-finding signs; make safety improvements and break ground this year on another section of the Washington Boulevard Trail.

You will also see coordinated activities across the County, a number of events throughout the year, coordinated activities across the region, and expanded outreach to the immigrant community.

Este año vamos a trabajar más con la comunidad y vamos a lanzar una campaña para mejorar la seguridad de los motoristas, peatones y los que andan en bicicleta. La vamos a denominar: Compartamos Nuestras Calles, Seamos Amables. Durante todo el año nos vamos a enfocar en esta campaña para tener más seguridad en las calles y también mejorar nuestra salud.

By Sharing Our Streets and Being a PAL – *Compartamos Nuestras Calles, Seamos Amables* – our community will be safer and healthier ... *for all of Arlington.*

Diversity and Inclusion

In 2013 we will build on the efforts and recommendations from our 2008 Diversity Dialogues. As described in the Task Force Report, Arlingtonians want “mindful leadership to strategically support Arlington’s diverse heritage and community ... [including] programs that link new and current residents.”

This year we will encourage traditional community groups, civic associations, neighborhood groups, non-profits and businesses to celebrate the ethnic and cultural diversity that makes Arlington such a fascinating and exciting place to live.

And yet we must do more.

Government has a role, and we will expand our efforts this year. In 2012, there was an important initiative to broaden civic engagement called PLACE: Participation, Leadership, and Civic Engagement. This year the County Board will expand on the Diversity Dialogues and prior civic engagement efforts to reach yet even more Arlingtonians.

Neighborhood Town Halls:

In 2013, we will hold a series of Neighborhood Town Halls that will bring County Board Members to every corner of Arlington to listen to folks' concerns and ideas. We will go to West Arlington, South, East, North, and Central Arlington.

Please join us at the first Neighborhood Town Hall on Wednesday, January 30 from 6:46 to 9 p.m. in the cafeteria of the Drew Community Center.

We will hold Neighborhood Town Halls every month except August and December – 10 Town Halls in all, with two of those walking in the neighborhoods. To see the full schedule, visit www.arlingtonva.us, search “town hall.”

Moving Forward Together

My Moving Forward Together agenda is an ambitious one. It is rooted in my experience as an immigrant who moved to this County over 20 years ago and took an unlikely path to community and political involvement.

Along the way I found that in Arlington, if you want to get involved and make a difference in our community, you can. And it does not matter where you are from or what background you may have. Here in our hometown, the spirit of our community allows plenty of opportunity for everyone to make a real difference and help every-day people. Who would have thought that the young boy who helped his struggling family by shining shoes in the central market in San Salvador, El Salvador, would become the Chairman – twice – in one of the best communities in the world? Our Arlington values of inclusion and diversity, for healthy living, for sustainability, and fiscal responsibility, will again guide us to continue being the community where – no matter what background – each person is indeed important.

I learned through my involvement in Arlington that, when we work together, value and respect each others' cultures and perspectives, we understand each other better and make great things happen.

So this year more than ever, I believe we can Move Forward Together – *Juntos Hacia Adelante* – for ALL of Arlington.

Thank you and best wishes for the New Year!

¡Feliz Año Nuevo y muchísimas gracias!

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