



A memo from Acting County Manager Mark Schwarzer

Today is a bittersweet day for us all. Barbara Donnellan, who many of us have worked closely with for decades, is heading off to new adventures. We will miss her. As Acting County Manager, I know that Barbara has left very big shoes to fill.

This is why I am reaching out to you on Day 1 of my tenure. Many of you may know that I have deep roots in this community. My wife, Jayme, and I have lived in Arlington for close to 30 years. Our two daughters went to Arlington Public Schools. For me, ensuring that Arlington remains a great place to live, work and play is personal. That is why it is such an honor to have been tapped by the County Board to lead what I believe to be the finest local government in the nation. I am excited about building on all the good work that Barbara did as County Manager, and about leading such a professional, talented, experienced team.

In the coming months, you will have many opportunities to share your ideas, celebrate your accomplishments, and detail your challenges and concerns with me. I will hold a series of informal employee roundtables with small groups, where I can hear from you and share with you in greater depth my areas of focus. I also will continue the tradition of holding periodic online chats with employees, and you will be seeing more memos like this one, sharing important news and keeping you informed on matters that affect you. In addition, I plan to institute regularly scheduled noon meet-ups, open to all employees who would like to lunch with me and chat. You'll also see me on "walkabouts," across the County, visiting community centers, fire stations, nurses' clinics, parks and other venues.

Together, I know we can meet the many challenges facing Arlington with the same unity of purpose and energy that County staff and elected leaders met them with back in the 1970s, when we were an aging suburb losing population and commercial base to the outer suburbs. The foundations they laid then revived and transformed this community.

Economic development will be my highest priority. We need an all-hands-on-deck effort to bring down our historically high office vacancy rate, and to fill the empty offices of Crystal City and Rosslyn with new, vibrant businesses. Our commercial base is crucial to Arlington's tax base, to its ability to provide high-quality services, programs and schools to our residents, and to our success. The Board, recognizing the urgency of the situation, has invested another \$1 million in economic development, and our team is aggressively marketing Arlington to the world.

Service Delivery/open data is another priority for me. This goes beyond the digital strategy that DTS is implementing. My overarching goal is to increase government transparency and make it easier and more satisfying for people to interact with County government. I want to push more useful information out to the people who really need it and to streamline our business practices to make it easier to do business with the County – whether that means pulling a permit for a bathroom remodel in a house or putting together a site plan for a commercial office building.

Strategic planning is my third priority – both within and among departments. Too often, in our effort to keep up with our daily workload, we lose sight of the importance of planning for the longer range future. I will hold a series of strategic conversations with departments and across departments in the coming months – to talk about what the future is for service delivery, staffing and management and how we make sure we are on the cutting edge of planning for that future.

Clearly, there is much to be done. I hope, in the coming months, as you get to know me better, you will come to see how important humor and joy is to me. I believe that public service is the best job in the world. I can't think of a better community, or a better government, in which to be doing it. So I hope that together, as we tackle the issues and continue to strive for excellence in all that we do, we also take time to have fun in our jobs, and to strengthen the human connections we have in the office and with the public that make this work worthwhile.

Mark Schwartz,
Acting County Manager