

Arlington County Board Vice Chair Erik Gutshall's Jan. 2, 2020 Remarks: Level Up

Leveling up is a concept in gaming in which a character experiences some sort of progression that usually entails unlocking new abilities, skills, access to new items, or as a benchmark of how far into the game a character is. I submit that Arlington enters 2020, not just as a new year, or even a new decade, but as a new higher level – our hard work and thoughtful planning have paid off – we've leveled up!

The year 2020 has always represented for me the far-off future. In my early career, Vision 2020 exercises and documents were everywhere, with the obvious play on perfect sight and 2020 as a distant utopian destination. Well, we've arrived and while Arlington is utopian by many measures, we are not without our challenges. Fortunately, we have done so much so well for so long, that we have earned access to new skills, abilities, and tools that allow us to level up and take our community to even greater heights. The hallmark of our new level to me is less talking about our need to adapt to a changing world, and more getting on with enacting our adaptations.

Not surprisingly, Amazon's arrival is a pivotal definitive event. We're no longer lamenting an office vacancy crisis, we now have the wherewithal to conquer the obstacle left in our path by BRAC and structural office market disruptions. We're taking our community to a new level with the increased tax revenue anticipated by the reversal of our pernicious office vacancy.

But Amazon's arrival has also leveled up our focus on how we grow. How we grow matters and our next level of managed growth will focus beyond first order urban design principles of sidewalk widths, building heights, and traffic circulation, and instead level up to an essential focus on equity, infrastructure like schools and storm water, and a broader definition of quality of life and livability.

As any 12-year-old gamer can tell us, the thrill of making it to a new level quickly subsides as the reality of the newer, more difficult challenges set in. With an eye to the future, I will continue to work with our top-notch staff, excellent business and non-profit partners, and, of course, our first-rate dedicated citizen volunteers to meet the challenges of our time as we

continue to unlock new abilities in our quest for a more livable and equitable Arlington.

Housing Arlington

How we grow matters. The next level of managed growth will require new tools and a modernized zoning ordinance to expand our housing supply in a way that enhances the livability of our existing neighborhoods. Richard Tucker and his team are already bringing new energy, creativity, and partnerships and resources to bear on the urgent need for housing. Grounded in policies that promote equity, opportunity, stability and adaptability, we will continue to leverage new sources of AHIF for lower income households and use the market to deliver new housing types for the missing middle. We've already begun the community conversation that will determine what the right housing mix for Arlington is. I commend the neighborhoods surrounding National Landing for the extensive citizen-led work to craft a Livability Action Plan for a collaborative approach to planning a highly livable community. They've leveled up!

Public Facilities Plan

Under the direction of the JFAC 2x2 Leadership Committee, APS and County staff have begun the development of a long-range, comprehensive Public Facilities Plan ("PFAC") to guide the collaborative, creative, timely, and efficient siting and development of County and Schools facilities.

The PFAC framework acknowledges the constant tension between urgent real-time needs for school seats of a particular type in a specific quadrant of the County by date certain, and the overwhelming desire to plan for school sites in a holistic manner that can only be done when thinking beyond a 5- or 10-year timeline. I will continue working with Matt Ladd, CPHD staff, and our APS counterparts, including Robert Ruiz, and JFAC Chair Greg Greeley to finalize the scope and begin drafting this next level plan by July of this year. The goal of the PFAC is to have options for seats in a master plan, so that when we need them as our school population grows, we have a simplified site selection process for Schools and County leaders to choose the best available site according to agreed-upon criteria, while avoiding pitting neighbor v. neighbor.

Community Energy Plan

A huge milestone for leveling up was the adoption this past summer of a major update to our CEP which commits us to achieving carbon neutrality by 2050. This is not an aspirational goal, but a true commitment that I intend to work with Demetra McBride's AIRE team to ensure we complete. The forthcoming implementation plan will incorporate goals for buildings; resilience; renewable energy; transportation, County government actions, and education and human behavior.

I share community-wide excitement that our General Assembly in Richmond has also levelled up this year. I know our incomparable Legislative Director Pat Carroll is already working with our delegation on legislation for renewable energy and tree conservation among others to help reach our goals.

Biophilic Design

Speaking of trees, resiliency, livability, and levelling up: reconnecting our built environment with nature is a new paradigm that will redefine the future of city life. More than just adding greenery, biophilic design incorporates patterns of nature into both private and public realms bestowing the benefits of beauty, stress reduction, higher productivity, better health, and greater resiliency.

Small Business

I join Mr. Schwartz and all my colleagues in welcoming our new Director of Economic Development, Telly Tucker. If landing Amazon was the penultimate final test of our last level, a reinvigorated focus on small, woman, and minority owned businesses (SWaM) will be the hallmark of our next level of equitable economic development. BizLaunch, led by Tara Palacios, will conduct a local strategic campaign to highlight and profile our small businesses, culminating in a celebration of Small Business Month in May with the inaugural launch of the Commonwealth of Virginia's SWaMie Awards. With new leadership at AED, I look forward to deep-dive conversations on what technical, financial, and regulatory assistance would help both cherished legacy businesses and entrepreneurial startups to level up.

Innovation

Finally, a key advantage of leveling up is the ability to take on slightly higher risk in pursuit of innovative solutions. For me, innovation is doing things differently, or doing different things to solve problems, usually aiming for a better outcome. I look forward to working with Chair Garvey to identify the barriers that keep risky ideas from the launch pad. Chris Horton, the County Auditor, has expertise to offer and I, personally, would love to pursue small-scale partnerships with APS students, through programs like Arlington Tech's capstone project, or Wakefield's senior project, to tackle discrete tasks to improve resident engagement, smarter workflow, and data-driven decisions.

Today is proof that even a distant future will one day come to pass. I'm honored to work on this next level with my amazing colleagues, talented Manager and his brilliant staff, and the passionate citizens who I know care about this community as much as each of us.