

The Village Way

May 2006

Vol. 39 No. 2

President's Message

You moved here for a reason!

It has been a busy spring. We celebrated the 114th Arbor Day Ceremony in Falls Church at Frady Park and saw the schematics of the Virginia Arbor Day Commons project to be built there in 2007. Our Neighborhood Tree Program had a very successful tree planting party in April and on May 6 we held our 39th Attic Treasures Sale. Thanks to your help we exceeded our goal and raised almost \$6,500. A BIG Thank You to all our wonderful volunteers. We also started the weekly coffee and book sales at the VPIS Farmers Market booth on May 13.

Coming up, we are planning for our general membership meeting to be held June 8. The Concerts in the Parks begin June 22 at Cherry Hill Park, and continue every Thursday for seven weeks. See page 5 for more details. And of course, Lou Olom will once again preside at the July 4 Independence Day Reading in Council Chambers at noon—simply not to be missed.

As you can see, the Village Society is hard at work to provide you with the many activities that make the City of Falls Church a GREAT community in which to live, work and play. Please write us at VillageSociety@yahoo.com and tell us how we are doing. We would love to hear your thoughts and ideas.

Finally, our web site, www.vpis.org, is undergoing renovations and hopefully by the time you read this newsletter you will find a much more dynamic and up-to-date web site for all our activities. Thanks again for your continued membership and support, we couldn't do it without YOU.

Barry Buschow, President



Spring Meeting June 8

The Falls Church
Village Preservation and Improvement
Society

Spring 2006 Membership Meeting

June 8, 2006 - 7:30 PM

Club Room

Falls Church Housing Corporation
330B S. Virginia Avenue
Falls Church, VA 22046

AGENDA

Welcome

Update on Society Activities

Vote on Bylaw Change

Designing Walkable Communities

Affordable Housing in Falls Church City

Special Recognition of
Retiring City Council Members

Adjourn to Social

The Village Preservation and Improvement Society, founded in 1885, is an active nonprofit citizen volunteer organization in the City of Falls Church, Virginia. The society works to preserve our natural and built environment and historic structures and landmarks, and it promotes cultural activities. Members are primarily residents and former residents or neighbors of the City of Falls Church and are of all political persuasions. They are bonded by their interest in and commitment to improving the city. Send comments, questions, or letters to the editor to: Village Preservation and Improvement Society, P.O. Box 6824, Falls Church, VA 22040 or e-mail to VillageSociety@yahoo.com.

Affordable Housing is Everyone's Business

by Steven Rogers, President, Falls Church Housing Corporation

Falls Church is defined by many things: our Memorial Day Parade, our Farmers Market, our Tinner Hill celebration and our First Night festivities. But even more than these, Falls Church is defined by its heart. Elected officials and volunteer members of boards and commissions dedicate countless hours to maintaining and improving our way of life. VPIS is an example of citizens working together to preserve the character and open space of our small city.

We have so much in Falls Church and our populace is so involved, we must not forget to help those less able to help themselves. City Manager Dan McKeever states that more than

700 affordable rental units are at risk. We as a community will be judged by how we respond to this challenge. The Falls Church Housing Corporation, chartered by the city 25 years ago, has as its mission and passion the creation and preservation of permanently affordable rental property. If the housing corporation fails in its mission, Falls Church would cease to be a diverse community. With the help of concerned citizens and organizations like VPIS, we will not fail, for to do so would signal the end of our village atmosphere. Won't you join us?



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VPIS Supports Pipestem Restrictions

by Jeff Peterson

In response to the request for public comment, VPIS wrote to the Falls Church City Council supporting changes to city ordinances that would prohibit, or at a minimum limit, pipestem lots in residential areas of the City of Falls Church.

VPIS commented that there is growing evidence that demand for residential growth is transforming established residential neighborhoods of the city. Some of the changes in the city's residential neighborhoods include:

- ▶ Expansion or tear down of existing houses to cover a larger percentage of a lot, often with a greater height;
- ▶ Addition of new houses on the few remaining lots in residential areas;
- ▶ Addition of new houses on the street fronts as a result of the division of an existing lot that was originally established as two "substandard" lots; and
- ▶ Addition of new houses on pipestem lots where the square footage of an existing lot can be divided to meet minimum requirements for a second lot but there is not sufficient street frontage for a conventional lot.

The combined effect of these factors is resulting in a gradual but steady evolution in the character of residential areas throughout the city. Some of these changes are positive and welcomed by neighbors. In many cases, however, the rapid rate of development results in declines in the character of neighborhoods. In these cases, any individual gains are more than offset by the diminishment in the character of the neighborhood as green spaces are paved, sunlight is blocked by ever taller buildings, mature trees are cut to squeeze in another house, and water runoff fills basements instead of streams.

The Pipestem Effect

Although the pipestem provisions of the city code should not be the only response to the changing character of neighborhoods, they are a good place to start. VPIS maintained that the

projects resulting from pipestem lots are often the most damaging to the character of a neighborhood for several reasons:

- ▶ They reduce the "walkability" of the neighborhood and increase traffic complexity because they result in a greater density of curb cuts/driveways along street frontage compared to new projects allowed under other provisions of the code.
- ▶ They may have a scale that is disproportionate to the neighborhood because these projects are often constructed on lots that only barely meet size requirements and are built to maximum lot coverage and height allowances.
- ▶ These projects are often constructed at lower elevations and can disrupt drainage patterns and cause water problems for neighbors.
- ▶ The construction of a new and large building on a pipestem lot can have significant negative consequences for the existing homes (e.g. a back deck on an existing home may end up facing directly into a new pipestem house).

VPIS Proposals

In its comments VPIS continued that, although full prohibition of pipestems is justifiable for the reasons cited above, the society would endorse alternatives that would limit the use of pipestem lots including:

- ▶ Greater setback requirements;
- ▶ Expanded street frontage requirements;
- ▶ Reduced lot coverage allowances; and
- ▶ Additional protections to avoid runoff impacts on neighbors.

VPIS also suggested that the city consider providing homeowners who have a potential pipestem lot with tax relief if they agree to maintain the property in an undeveloped state.

VPIS will stay involved in the city effort to address the specific question of pipestem lots as well as the larger challenge of protecting the character of the residential neighborhoods of the city.

Christian Science Reading Room—

A Notable Design Worth Protecting

The Christian Science Reading Room on Little Falls Street is in the cross-hairs of new development.

Milton Grigg, pictured at

right, was arguably one of the most distinguished designers of Virginia traditional architecture, following in the tradition of Thomas Jefferson and James Wren. In Falls Church, he designed the Christian Science Reading



Room in 1958. During the same period, he oversaw the preservation of the Falls Church Episcopal and added the church's Nicholson Hall wing. Grigg's work is prominent in Williamsburg, where he was an early architect of the Historic Williamsburg Foundation, restoring historic structures and designing new ones to complement the originals. His works can also be found around the University of Virginia and in

Charlottesville where he practiced later in his life. A recent magazine article about him in *Virginia Living* recognizes the level of his accomplishments and value of his buildings. A quick look on the Internet shows that properties that have any connection to Milton Grigg are heralded throughout Virginia.

Destroying a Milton Grigg building would be similar to losing a Frank Lloyd Wright building: something we will come to regret, should it occur. The Reading Room is perfect in its form, using classical elements and restrained proportions. A walk into the interior, the main chamber, reveals a room that you would expect to find in an historic estate. It alone is worth the visit. Only from the interior can you get a good view of the hidden rear garden surrounded by a serpentine wall (similar to UVA and Monticello). It is a treasure worth preserving.

The VPIS Board of Directors is requesting that the city **not** entertain any development proposals that would endanger such a landmark building.

The Arts in Falls Church *by Jane Scully*

Falls Church Arts (FCA), the growing non-profit arts organization, was born out of the same proud grassroots tradition that has created many important groups in our city. From the ideas of a few people, it has rapidly grown into an enthusiastic and active group that has sponsored numerous events across the arts and achieved broad community support.

FCA shares a purpose with VPIS: "to benefit the culture and prosperity" of the city, a goal first laid out by the society at its founding in 1885. In the same spirit, the FCA mission is to ensure that the arts are an essential part of the cultural environment of the Falls Church area.

In its three years, FCA has created and sup-

ported some exciting projects including a terrific art auction, six large art shows, and a lovely temporary gallery (we hope for another). The events have all been very well received and greatly enjoyed. FCA has also brought artists together to discuss their issues and to give them better support for their work.

Watch for upcoming events this year: art shows and sales, music performances, summer Arts in the Park at Cherry Hill, a second film festival, Taste of Falls Church, plus more events still being planned. It's exciting, so come join in (www.FallsChurchArts.org) and help keep the arts lively in Falls Church!

Historically Speaking

The Virginia Colony in the 1600s

by Ron Anzelone and Ric Terman

The vast territory spanning the area between the Rappahannock and Potomac Rivers, traditionally known as Virginia's Northern Neck, was granted by England's King Charles II to seven of his loyal followers. After many territorial disputes, Lord Culpeper gained sole proprietorship of Northern Neck in 1688. Culpeper's daughter later married Lord Fairfax, thus making the Fairfax family sole proprietor of the Northern Neck by 1690. The population of this territory grew rapidly, from an estimated 210 in 1610 to an estimated 78,000 in 1700.

Since the early colonists belonged to the Church of England, the General Assembly also created new parishes as settlement progressed. Each parish elected twelve freeholders and housekeepers to a vestry, which managed not only local church matters but also collected tithes (head taxes for white males and all blacks over

fifteen years of age) from each landowner, surveyed all land boundaries, and maintained community humanitarian activities.

By 1700, pioneers had established frontier farms. The land occupied by the future City of Falls Church was originally covered with timber, but, like most of the Northern Neck of Virginia, it was quickly cultivated for tobacco by the earliest settlers to the region. Tobacco was the principal crop both on the large plantations and the small farms. Unfortunately, tobacco rapidly depleted the soil and abandoned farms were common.

Life for most colonists of the 1600s focused on the county courthouse, the Anglican church, and the fields. Without any of those, the Falls Church area remained primarily forest until it was settled in 1699.

Mark Your Calendars!

Concerts in the Park

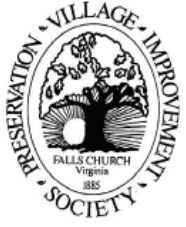
Mark your calendars for Thursdays, starting on Thursday, June 22 at 7:00. That's the night the popular Concerts in the Park on the grounds of Cherry Hill Park will begin. Returning for the 14th year, these concerts are a relaxing way to enjoy a picnic and visit with friends while you hear live entertainment. Don't forget to save room for the ice cream sundaes that VPIS will have for sale. Be sure to keep the schedule handy so you won't miss a single one of these great concerts.



Cherry Hill Concerts in the Park 2006 Schedule

- June 22** Tony Martucci Quartet—Straight-up Jazz
- June 29** Latin Soul Band—Salsa, Merengue, Bachata, Reggaeton
- July 6** Andrew Acosta and the New Old Time Band—Old Time Music
- July 13** Gypsy Strings—Eastern European Music
- July 20** The Blue Dragons—Middle Eastern, Aborigine and African
- July 27** The Falls Church Concert Band
- August 3** Randy Barrett and the Barretones—Bluegrass





Falls Church Village Preservation
and Improvement Society
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www.VPIS.org

**NONPROFIT
ORGANIZATION
U.S. POSTAGE PAID
FALLS CHURCH, VA
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Upcoming VPIS Events

Every Saturday: coffee and book sales at
Farmers Market

June 8: Spring Membership Meeting

June 22: Concert in the Park

June 29: Concert in the Park

July 4: Independence Day Readings

July 6: Concert in the Park

July 13: Concert in the Park

July 20: Concert in the Park

July 27: Concert in the Park

August 3: Concert in the Park

Special Notice

In response to a request from the IRS, VPIS is amending its bylaws regarding funding other nonprofit projects. VPIS will require a report be filed with it to document that the funds were expended for the appropriate activity. The membership will vote on the bylaw change at the Spring Membership meeting on June 8. The full text of the proposed amendment is at www.vpis.org.