

The Village Way

March 2006

Vol. 39 No. 1

President's Message

You moved here for a reason!

Perhaps you are among those who moved to Falls Church because of our strong sense of community. The mission of the Village Society is to preserve and improve that sense of community. It is your membership dues that help us to sponsor projects and events that are integral to Falls Church City's culture and environment, such as:

- † Summer concerts in Cherry Hill Park
- † Neighborhood Tree Program
- † Arbor Day celebrations
- † Watch Night (New Year's Eve)
- † Independence Day Readings
- † Excellence in Design Awards
- † Farmers Market information booth
- † Community Gardens (Tricentennial, President's, and Elizabeth Graham Gardens)

In 2006, the society will continue to monitor design, development, and environmental issues to ensure that the City of Falls Church preserves and improves the quality of life for its citizens. We hope that you will support our efforts with your membership in the society.

May 6th will be our annual Attic Treasures sale in the Community Center. The proceeds from the sale help fund the various activities such as the Neighborhood Tree Program and the summer concerts in Cherry Hill Park. I am sure you agree, these activities help provide the sense of community we feel in our city. On June 8 we hope to see you at our annual spring general membership meeting. More information will be sent later.

So if you haven't joined yet or renewed your membership, please do it now so VPIS can continue to keep you informed about community life in the City of Falls Church.

Barry Buschow, President



Annual Membership Drive Under Way

Our members are an invaluable source of ideas, energy, and resources—the three elements that have made the Village Society one of the most active, dynamic organizations in the City of Falls Church.

In January, we launched our 2006 Membership Campaign. Our first mailing focused on contacting 2005 members. This was followed by a letter to former members and potential new members.

- If you have already sent in your annual membership dues, thank you!
- If you have not yet responded to the membership letter, please check the address label of this newsletter. Those who have not yet sent in their dues have their names highlighted on the label. Please respond as soon as possible.
- If you need another membership card and return envelope, please contact Annette Mills, VPIS Membership Chair, at 703-532-0884.

Welcome to all our new members, and welcome back to all our returning members! We look forward to seeing you at many of this year's Village Society events.

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.

Historically Speaking Local 'Prehistory' by Ric Terman

First in a series

The Historical Commission is very pleased to be invited to contribute a regular column to *The Village Way*. We will start with a brief synopsis of our local "prehistory."

Northern Virginia between the Appalachian Blue Ridge and the Atlantic Coastal Plain is situated on the Piedmont peneplain (an almost flat surface of 400 million-year-old igneous and metamorphic rocks). In the last 65 million years, gravels were deposited on the peneplain and later overall uplift has promoted moderate erosion to form gravel-capped hills and winding, narrow, flat-bottomed valleys. In the Falls Church region, the generally southeast-trending Tripps Run and Four Mile Run at 250-300-foot elevations are separated by a ridge at 350-400 feet above sea level extending from Taylor Hill to Mount Daniel. There is another parallel ridge dominated by Prout Hill southwest of Tripps Run. By the Ice Ages, this attractive landscape was characterized by deep weathering and fertile black soil covered by game-rich forests and fish-filled streams.

The first people to set foot upon what is now Falls Church were Native Americans, whom the

Europeans called Indians. Evidence has been found of these hunter-gatherers passing through or living in this region some 12,000 years before the white man arrived. For several centuries European sailors explored the eastern edge of the Americas, but colonization really began during the 1500s in the North Atlantic region and especially the Central American region. Beginning in 1584, the English attempted colonization in a middle Atlantic region that they named Virginia.

In 1607, a permanent English colony was established at Jamestown. Over the next years Captain John Smith explored the Potomac River and its principal tributaries as far as he could proceed by boat. In northern Virginia, he encountered Algonquin tribes mostly as farmers on the Coastal Plain, Sioux tribes mostly as hunters on the Piedmont, and transient Iroquoians; the Falls Church area was probably visited by all of these tribes. The Indians had established trails which became the foundation for the subsequent main transportation routes in the region. Included among those trails was one running from just below present-day Alexandria to Vestal's Gap in

continued on page 3

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Start Collecting Your Treasures for...
THE 39TH ATTIC TREASURES SALE
May 6, 2006, 10:00 a.m. to 2:00 p.m., Community Center
... but NO JUNK!

The Attic Treasures Sale is the primary fundraiser for the general programs of the Village Preservation and Improvement Society, and is also one of the major community events of the year. For the sale, we place all items in one of our "stores," run by a store manager and clerks. Live music makes this event as entertaining as it is beneficial. By donating your unneeded treasures, you will support some of Falls Church's finest community-building programs.

On Friday, May 5, we will collect items to prepare for the sale at the Community Center:

Household Goods and Kitchenware

Toys

Plants

Jewelry

Books (no textbooks, encyclopedias, magazines, or date-sensitive publications)

Hardware

Special Treasures (antiques/collectibles)

Musical Instruments and Recordings

(records, CDs, tapes)

All donations must be clean and in good working order. We will accept nothing that requires repair or cleaning. We do not accept clothing, large items, or electronic products. Items must be lightweight enough for Dave Eckert to lift *by himself*. This is a high-quality sale and we accept only those items that can sell in the four hours of the sale. For further information or if you would like to volunteer to help, contact Marian Starr at 703-237-0285, or by e-mail at starrpower@starpower.net.

Would You Like a FREE Tree?

If you have space for a tree in front of your home, you may be eligible to receive a FREE street tree as part of the Neighborhood Tree Program!

During the past five years, the Neighborhood Tree Program (NTP) has planted over 350 street trees in the City of Falls Church. Launched by the Village Society in 2000, the NTP has two basic goals: increasing the number and quality of street trees in our community and educating our citizens about the value of trees.



The NTP Tree Squad will plant trees in different locations around the city on Saturday morning, March 25. Then on April 8, the annual Spring Planting Party will take place in a selected neighborhood.

If you are interested in having a street tree planted adjacent to your property,

or if you would like to volunteer to plant trees, call NTP Chair Annette Mills at 703-532-0884.

'Prehistory' continued from page 2

the Blue Ridge, which was the precursor to what we know today as Leesburg Pike. After a final war ending in 1677 between the Indians and the settlers, the Indians quickly left the region, and English settlement grew apace.

In 1999, Falls Church held a Native American Festival with appropriate displays and activities. Should the city have a regular or periodic event, perhaps as part of a broader city-wide activity such as the Fall Festival, commemorating its rather obscure local Indian heritage? Comments can be forwarded to the author, Ric Terman: ric@terman.us or 703-532-9085.

VPIS Monitors Development *by Jeff Peterson*

Over the past year, VPIS has continued its long tradition of working with the city to define long-term plans for a livable, sustainable community. In addition, VPIS is increasingly involved in helping to assure that development projects are consistent with city ordinances.

Comprehensive Plan/City Center

VPIS actively participated in the recent revision of the city's Comprehensive Plan, with special attention to the guidelines for development of the city center. VPIS pressed for a stronger commitment to retail, dining, and office uses in the city center in relation to the expected significant numbers of high-end condominiums. In addition, VPIS urged the city council to:

- * Expand commitment to open space, green space, and trees within the city center;
- * Clarify language relating to "green buildings" to endorse objective scoring of projects using the Leadership for Energy and Environmental Design (LEED) scoring system;
- * Make the city *Design Guidelines* required, not discretionary, in city center designs;
- * Strengthen language to assure that city center projects will comply with the city's affordable housing policy;
- * Make a firm commitment to using financial models to quantify the net revenues and costs of development projects; and
- * Reinforce the commitment to amenities such as public art, bike paths, and a pedestrian friendly environment.

The city council adopted extensive amendments to the proposed Comprehensive Plan strengthening the plan in many of the key areas addressed by VPIS.

Development Ordinances

In February, VPIS wrote to the city council expressing concern that a number of recent projects around the city appear to be inconsistent with current ordinances. VPIS asked that the city review the implementation of development ordinances. Specifically, VPIS asked the city to

review practices related to front and side setbacks, substandard lots, pipestem lots, building heights, and coordination of the zoning ordinance and Chesapeake Bay ordinance.

In addition, VPIS asked that the city manager provide a report on the findings of the development review to the public. The report is to include recommendations for changes to the implementation of current ordinances or changes to the ordinances themselves.

The city council has referred the VPIS letter to the city manager and VPIS is waiting for the city manager's decision of whether to conduct the review and make the requested report. **VPIS encourages members to contact the city manager and request that the city conduct the development review and make public its findings.**

Read Building

In January, the city council asked that VPIS review and comment on the Special Exception Application for the Read Building, proposed for the old service center at 402 West Broad Street. VPIS provided detailed comments on the application and additional comments on a revised application in February.

VPIS commended the applicant's effort to design a project that would be a good fit for the site but urged the city to make several key changes to the proposed project including:

- * Make a firm commitment to the proposed "green roof";
- * Include within the proposed "teacher workforce units" affordable housing units that are managed under the city Affordable Housing Policy (which gives priority to low income seniors);
- * Reject street level setback and landscape variances justified by the addition of a "green roof";
- * Make project adjustments to expand parking, such as removal of the drive-thru facility at the bank; and

continued on page 6

How and Why the Village Society Was Reestablished in 1965

by Lou Olom

It was a proposed new city road in the early 1960s that led to the current Village Preservation and Improvement Society. This road would have severed the historic Lawton House and its magnificent gardens, and the proposal triggered deep concern among nearby neighbors and quickly spread across the city. The furor over this proposal galvanized many city residents, especially those who lived close to the house. Friends and neighbors spoke to each other about what appeared to be a “done-deal” calamity. Was there any chance the proposal might be stopped or altered? Neighborhood groups held meetings, drew up a petition, and collected scores of signatures protesting the city’s threat to Lawton House and asking that the project be halted.

Two people in particular—Miss Betty Styles as she was called (for whose family the library is named) and Elizabeth Graham—instigated the protest. The reputation, integrity and energy of these two splendid, well-known women drew many supporters and soon there was a full-fledged neighborhood revolt. The two women worked hand-in-hand with the owners of Lawton House, Louise Shepherd and her husband. Citizen interest became so well organized and intense that it almost resembled a political campaign. Once the city council examined the vigorous protest against this misguided street project, it abandoned the idea.

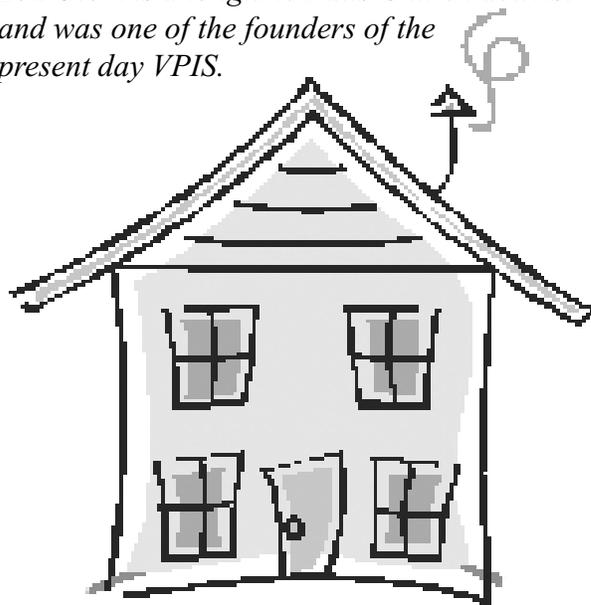
It was during these early years of the 1960s that zoning and planning commissions were beginning to make decisions that further cut into the village-like atmosphere that existed, especially in the older part of Falls Church. The surprise threat to the Lawton House led to further discussions among residents about the possibility of forming an organization to protect against similar incursions into residential homes, incursions that would generally be accompanied by the usual desecration of trees and lawns and gardens in the area. Citizens realized they needed a permanent way to express their concerns.

Discussions often involved the words “preservation” and “improvement” or as some said subsequently: “We aim to preserve the best of Falls Church and to improve the rest.” A board was established, a constitution prepared, a letter of incorporation written, a president selected, and The Village Preservation and Improvement Society was reestablished. The first president was the late Mel Bolster who was followed after six months by Elwood Street. Both got the society off to a good start. When the late Harold Silverstein, a former city council member, joined the board he formalized the link with the original Falls Church Village Society of the 1880s.

In the ensuing years, many new developments and challenges to the beauty and integrity of our “village-like little city” required an articulation of the society’s concern and opposition to inappropriate construction and development. Some of these development issues became hot political battles in the 1960s and 1970s.

This is just a cursory account of the reincarnation of VPIS in 1965. In future installments, we’ll recapture some of the fascinating local issues that VPIS has been involved in over the succeeding four decades.

Lou Olom is a longtime Falls Church activist and was one of the founders of the present day VPIS.



Upcoming Events

April

13 - Board Meeting—Thursday night, 7:30 p.m.,
Location TBD

18 - Falls Church City Film Festival—Tuesday, 6:30
p.m., State Theatre

22 - Arbor Day Ceremony—Saturday, 3:00 p.m.,
Fraday Park. The conceptual plan for the Virginia
Arbor Day Monument will be unveiled at this time.

May

6 - Attic Treasures Sale—Saturday, 10:00 a.m.—2:00
p.m., Community Center

11 - Board Meeting—Thursday night, 7:30 p.m.,
Mark and Ellen Gross's house

29 - Memorial Day Parade

Development, continued from page 4

* Commit to the objective scoring of the project
under the LEED system.

The planning commission and the city council
approved the project adopting several of the
improvements proposed by VPIS.

Future VPIS Activity

VPIS will continue to actively participate in
issues related to the city center and development
projects. The VPIS letters to the city concerning
the Comprehensive Plan, development issues,
and the Read Building are available on the
Internet at www.VPIS.org.

The Village Society Board of Directors is
contemplating a contribution to the legal case
brought by Ridge Place neighbors. The neigh-
bors are challenging the decision by the Board of
Zoning Appeals concerning development in that
neighborhood. Please let the board know your
thoughts on this matter. Our e-mail address is
VillageSociety@yahoo.com. More details can be
found at www.VPIS.org.



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