

# The Village Way

April 2007

Vol. 40 No.1

## President's Message

### You moved here for a reason!

This year promises to be another action-packed year in the City of Falls Church. By the time you read this we hope to have the **Sue Olm Memorial Garden** underway at the entrance to the city between Koons Ford and Syms Clothing Store at Seven Corners. We also hope to have new City of Falls Church signs installed. Our annual **Arbor Day Ceremony** will be on April 21 at Frady Park, 3:00 pm and we hope to have some exciting updates on the Virginia Arbor Day Commons project.

May 5 will be our 40th 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. Our **Spring Meeting** will be May 20 and the discussion topic will be the city center. Tom Gittins, owner of Art and Frame of Falls Church, will host our event at 111 Park Avenue (across from Kaiser Permanente) so please put it on your calendar. More information will be sent later.

I hope you have taken advantage of our new 501(c)(3) (nonprofit organization) status and renewed your membership so we can continue to offer you:

- Summer Concerts in Cherry Hill Park
- Neighborhood Tree Program
- Arbor Day Celebrations
- Farmers Market Coffee & Books
- Independence Day Readings
- Excellence in Design Awards
- Community Gardens
- Watch Night (New Year's Eve)

Hope to see you at all of our events.

Barry Buschow, President



## Upcoming Events

**April 21—Arbor Day Ceremony:**

*Frady Park, 3 pm*

**May 5—40th Attic Treasures Sale**

*Community Center, 10 am till 1 pm*

**May 20—Spring General Meeting, City Center Discussion**

*111 Park Ave.,*

*Falls Church Art & Frame, 3 pm*

**May 28—Memorial Day Parade & Booth**

**June 21—August 2—Summer Concerts:**

*Thursday Nights at Cherry Hill Park, 7 pm*

**July 4—Independence Day Readings**

*City Hall, noon*

**November 11—Fall General Meeting**

**December 31—Watch Night**

Go to [www.VPIS.org](http://www.VPIS.org) for further information.

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](mailto:VillageSociety@yahoo.com).

# Colonial Falls Church in the 1700s

by Ric Terman

Following the 1699 Big Chimneys squatters, eight major land grants were made between 1724 and 1742 in the Falls Church area; only small areas remained unclaimed. Most of the purchasers recruited tenants to occupy and cultivate the land. In Virginia, tobacco was the principal crop, constituting about half of total colonial exports. Selected “rolling roads” were improved by removing stumps to accommodate the rolling of tobacco in hogsheads, large cylindrical casks with two side shafts, pulled by horses or oxen to the ports. Dockside warehouse inspectors, established by a 1730 law, determined the quality and quantity of tobacco in each hogshead; their receipts, tobacco notes, were legal tender.

In this region, the Virginia General Assembly authorized warehouses at Alexandria (1732), Pohick Creek (1732), Occoquan River (1734), and (Little) Falls (1742). In the vicinity of The Falls Church, the Leesburg-Alexandria rolling road was generally in the position of East and West Fairfax Streets, trending southeast between the current Broad Street and Hillwood Avenue, and northwest

winding its way up to the current George Mason High School area.

In 1732, the Virginia General Assembly created the Truro Parish. The next year its vestry built a wooden “New” Church near the rolling road; it was named “The Falls Church” in 1757. George Mason (1748-64) and George Washington (1762-64) were members of the vestry. In 1765, Truro Parish divided; the new Fairfax Parish built a brick church designed by James Wren in 1767-69; the church became the regional social center. Also about this time, itinerant Baptist preachers and Methodist circuit riders visited the area.

In 1742, when Fairfax County was established coincident with the Truro Parish, the total population was 4,125 including 29 percent slaves; in 1782, the first state census counted 8,763 people including 41 percent slaves. Slave labor was an important economic and demographic factor in the area during the 18th century, with the black population growing more rapidly than the white. By 1776, an estimated 65 people lived within 1.5 mile of the church.

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## Special City Center Section

# City Center Project Needs Major Revision

The Falls Church Village Preservation and Improvement Society (VPIS) has established a City Center Design Team to work with the city and others to promote development of the city center in a manner that is consistent with these principles, expressed in the “Street-Works” plan and the City Comprehensive Plan.

During a consensus-building process over the past five years, the citizens endorsed a set of general principles for a city center that apply to the creation of what Street-Works termed a “Great



Place.” Such a place must include “memorable open space, intimate scale, distinct identity

and a constant sense of belonging.” It must encourage lively sidewalk activity. It should be composed of a mix of residential and office buildings with first floor retail in structures that have “a pedestrian scale and architectural character that is unique to the community.” Old Town Alexandria, Georgetown, and Annapolis are nearby places that follow the principles of great place-making.

The first major city center project was proposed recently by Atlantic Realty. The proposal has some positive elements and could be an important step toward making city center a reality. As a new proposal, however, it leaves numerous, significant questions unresolved. The proposed project fails to meet three key goals for a revitalized downtown:

- **Lack of Public Open Space:** The project must include public open space usable for formal and informal gatherings. Open spaces restricted to

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## Economic Development Alternatives

*by Lou Olom*

Most Falls Church residents have always expressed the need for economic development. However, sharp differences of opinion developed over the years about the height, density, design, and purpose of the structures that were to house the proposed development.

Developers invariably stated their need to utilize every square foot of the land they acquired, and to obtain as much height and density as they desired. Landscaping was at a minimum.

In the past, the viewpoints of organizations like VPIS and citizens who share its point of view and concerns over the values of the city’s inherited historic character, its small community life, and sense of place was upheld and shared by our city gov-

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## A Different Point of View *by Bob Burnett*

I find it curious that any discussion or proposal for Falls Church’s city center plan spirals into heated discussion about “looming” building height, unbearable “density” and a general loss of “small town feel.” Here we are, this supposed “oasis inside the beltway” as I’ve heard it called; a place of near-obsessive scrutiny about any new building proposal. All this talk, and all this anguish about “development” changing us. Meanwhile, I rarely, if ever, hear any discussion about changing the biggest sprawling disaster in the city—our main roads, namely Broad St. and Washington St. These pedestrian-impassable roads are pseudo 25 mile-per-hour commuter byways for the region’s—not the city’s—car traffic.

In the book *Cities Back from the Edge: New Life for Downtown*, Roberta Brandes Gratz and Norman Mintz state that the biggest eliminator of

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ernment. But such practical beliefs faltered and then fell under the onslaught of a frenetic ill-conceived building program which has radically changed the distinctive look and charm of our city in recent years.

The best examples of the differences architecturally are Independence Square and the building across from it on Broad Street that was redesigned by Paul Barkley. Then gaze on George Mason Square, the first ugly attack on West Broad by a developer who promised one thing, and produced a 90,000 sq. ft. building irrespective of its appearance. We never saw him again. He took his profits and fled. We had two top-flight Falls Church architects counsel with him by asking that he reconsider his design proposal and he curtly refused despite citizen protest. VPIS, which first supported him publicly, learned.

Today, we are confronted by increases in height and density that invite greater residential than commercial enterprise. Wasn't the need for commercial development that rationalized the primary purpose for economic development—the proliferation of increased revenues? More important perhaps is the radical change in our physical environment and its appearance. Suburban has become urban and Falls Church "city" is becoming Falls Church City. Is this inevitable because of metropolitan pressures? Have we become a deterministic society and city? Is there no other way of accommodating to these pressures? For the results will be seen in the future civic life and decreased citizen participation. Must we eventually resemble Ballston or the Bronx? Should we continue to move from being a "small city" to becoming a "city?" But today the deeds are half done and more of the same is being planned and acted upon and the question is: can we all stop, look and listen or is it already too late? Can we still reconsider the path we are taking? Are there any better possibilities?

Let me cite a few alternatives: ranging from Georgetown, DC; Princeton, New Jersey; Sonoma, Arizona; Madrid, Spain among many other European cities—east and west, to Charleston, South Carolina. These contain developments of the highest order—attractive, even distinctive, appealing

to many local consumers and visitors, i.e., tourists—and become profitable, highly profitable.

These alternatives demonstrate how small-scale development can enhance as well as be profitable.

1. The development by Volpe Construction Company is right on very busy M street in Georgetown. It combines small, commercial retail stores on the street floor. The second story contains many small offices and a third flight features small apartments that are delightfully designed.
2. Princeton, New Jersey development also has many quality retail stores. The latter are topped by a second and third story of offices and apartments. A small "way," about 15 or 20 feet in width, consists of complimentary landscape. And on the other side of the "way" is a seven- or eight-story inn, highly visible to way-walkers. It also contains a huge basement that contains an informal well-designed basement for relaxation and fun. This is "Palmer Square."
3. Sonoma, Arizona has one of the prettiest small business developments I've seen: a one-story mall in desert colors with landscaping reflecting historic Spanish houses and landscape of Arizona—a very busy, attractive, and profitable development.
4. Large civic centers in Spain. Again these centers are attractive and busy with huge squares supporting large places for many autos and sporting the same street-story businesses, second, third and even fourth floors of offices and apartments.
5. There is also wonderful Charleston, South Carolina with its great, creative, and imaginative but practical mayor. They did just the opposite of what we are doing in Falls Church. Here is a city that desires to create a small-town look, that appreciates the historic character of a small city. And what a difference it makes! And I see just the opposite goals, in little Falls Church as evidenced by the plans and decisions of city officials. I see no such concepts either in council decisions or in planning. Quite the contrary and that is what is so unfortunate. There seems to be

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building residents and wider than normal sidewalks are not an alternative to public open space.

➤ **Overwhelming Building Height and Mass:**

The proposed ten and eleven story buildings, whose heights are exaggerated because of the high ground upon which they stand, are simply too big and need to be scaled to more human proportions and designed with the goal of creating more welcoming street experiences.

➤ **Harm to Big Chimneys Park:** The project would significantly diminish Big Chimneys Park by taking about 4,500 square feet for a road, blocking sunlight with a nine-story building next to the park, and generating noise, pollution, and safety issues by bringing delivery trucks and residential traffic to a new road along the park.

Additional concerns and questions about the project are described in a letter from the VPIS Design Team to the city.

Based on these concerns, the VPIS Design Team recommended that the City Council ask Atlantic Realty to submit a new or amended Special Exemption Application that makes significant changes in the proposed project prior to taking any action on the project. The VPIS Board of Directors endorsed the letter to the Council at its meeting on March 8.

The full text of the VPIS letter is available on our website at [www.VPIS.org](http://www.VPIS.org). VPIS members may wish to review the VPIS letter on the Atlantic Realty project and provide comments to the city or to members of the City Council.

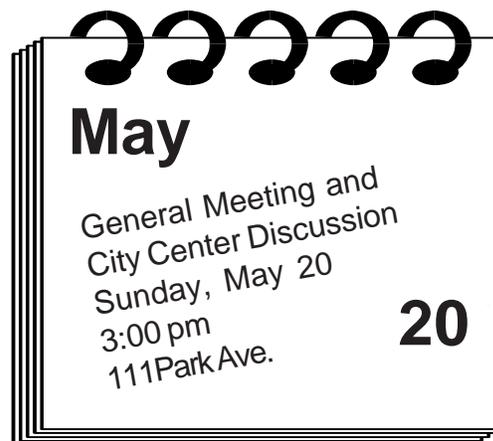


a thriving public realm, where people live and businesses succeed, has nothing to do with building heights or increases in density but a community's inability to build for people first and not for the convenience of cars. "Speeding traffic and pedestrian street life are antithetical and incomparable" they state. The book goes on to point to places like New Haven, Connecticut, where the seemingly radical notion of slowing down automobile traffic with narrower lanes, creating on-street and shared parking, implementing usable bike lanes and making truly passable street crossings for people has created a strengthened downtown for both social and economic life.

Before we get absorbed with building heights and density we need to repeat this mantra: pedestrian movement and comfort, not vehicular mobility, form the central and defining standard. It matters little how tall or how much mixed use, office, commercial or retail we add if we continue to rely on the failed road system model as it currently stands. We could build zilch in Falls Church City and still would remain the zip-through for the region's ever-increasing traffic.

I feel our city center needs to be modeled after what sociologist William Whyte once wrote: "...a place for news and gossip, for the creation of ideas...for hatching deals, for starting parades—this is the stuff of public life in a city. The human congress is the genius of place and its reason for being."

Hmmm...isn't that interesting....no mention of cars....



*Olom, continued from page 4*

only one concept which drags in revenue and we see its evidence. And if this object is not remediable it will be the end of the once charming little city of Falls Church. My major fear is that even if the powers-that-be finally see the results of their decisions, the damage will be irreversible and too late. I hope VPIS can and will help them see a different approach more in scale with the small-town character of our city, more consonant with earliest plans produced by that fine Alexandria firm that sketched what a beautiful center can look like.

Many of us have sought to make our school system one of highest quality. We succeeded and I, for one, always hoped we could try and do as well with economic development. But we settled on institution-like structures, so characteristic of big cities and so disproportionate to our small-scale entity. Violations of scale have been the major transgression. How can we reconcile 7-, 8- or planned 10-story buildings with small-town character and scale of this little city?



## Summer Concerts in Cherry Hill Park

**M**ark your calendars now, because you won't want to miss a single one of the Concerts in the Park this summer.

VPIS is proud to announce its lineup for the 15th season of Summer Concerts in Cherry Hill Park. Cosponsored by the Recreation and Parks Department, with support of the Friends of Cherry Hill Foundation, the concerts are a Thursday night tradition in Falls Church. In addition, local artists will present their work courtesy of Falls Church Arts. Bring a picnic and enjoy music in the park. Concerts begin at 7:00 pm.

**June 21** Falls Church Concert Band

**June 28** Sin Miedo Band

**July 5** Tom Principato

**July 12** The Shebeens

**July 19** Sudden M Pac

**July 26** Andrew Acosta

**August 2** Randy Barrett



## Annual Membership Drive Is Under Way

**I**n December, we launched our 2007 Membership Campaign one month early, hoping to give those of you who wanted the extra tax deduction a chance to claim it for 2006. (VPIS secured 501(c)(3), nonprofit organization, status in 2006.)

Three separate letters went out: one to current members, one to life members, and one to neighbors we hope will join.

In late February we followed up with a second appeal to members we haven't heard from. We enclosed a schedule for the Concerts in Cherry Hill Park this summer as an added reminder of one piece of the fun that VPIS has in store for the spring and summer.

If our letter crossed in the mail with your payment, thank you for sending it in. If you have not yet renewed your membership, please respond as soon as possible. If you need another membership card and return envelope, please contact Carol Sly, VPIS Membership Chair, at 703-538-6272. And if you have any neighbors you think would like to join, Carol can get you membership materials or send a letter to them directly.

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.

Start Collecting Your Treasures for...  
**THE 40<sup>TH</sup> ATTIC TREASURES SALE**  
May 5, 2007  
10:00 am to 1:00 pm  
... 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 by Andrew Acosta and fine food provided by Cosmopolitan Catering make this event as entertaining and enjoyable as it is beneficial. By donating your unneeded treasures, you will support some of Falls Church's finest community-building programs.

On Friday, May 4, we will collect all items to prepare for the sale at the Community Center. Drop items off between 9:00 am and 9:00 pm. The following items are welcome:

- Books (no textbooks, encyclopedias, magazines, or date-sensitive publications)
- Musical Instruments and Recordings (records, CDs, tapes)
- Plants, Gardening Items, and Outdoor Ornaments
- Household Goods and Kitchenware
- Special Treasures (antiques, collectibles)
- Toys     Jewelry     Hardware

**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 one person cannot move, computer equipment, or non-working electronics or bicycles. Items must be lightweight enough for one person to lift alone. This is a quality sale and we accept only those items that can sell in three hours. For further information, or to volunteer to help, contact Marian Starr at 703-237-0285, or Nancy Brandon at 703-536-8230.

## Plans Set for Sue Olom Garden

Planting of the Sue Olom Garden is due to begin when the ground thaws and a permit is issued by the Virginia Department of Transportation. The spot is located on the traffic island at the East Broad Street entrance to the city at Seven Corners. VPIS has been working with the city arborist on details, including relocation of the City of Falls Church sign onto the island. The sign is currently near the island, next to the sidewalk. The project will also include a memorial plaque placed near the garden. Watch for a public announcement of the dedication ceremony.

## Farmers Market Needs Your Help

Starting on May 12, VPIS continues its long-standing tradition of selling coffee for trees at the Falls Church Farmers Market every Saturday. The booth will also feature VPIS products for sale. While Starbucks coffee at a discounted rate to benefit the Neighborhood Tree Program is certainly a draw, the VPIS booth is a great gathering place for friends and neighbors.

This treasured VPIS institution can only continue with volunteer help. If you have an hour or two to spare on Saturdays, please volunteer at the VPIS booth. Contact Elizabeth Meade at [harkinsmeade@earthlink.net](mailto:harkinsmeade@earthlink.net) or 703-536-2333 for more information.



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# City of Falls Church Celebrates Arbor Day

Saturday, April 21, 2007

**A**rbor Day goes back to its roots this year with a celebration at Frady Park, the site of the first Arbor Day celebration in the City of Falls Church and the Commonwealth of Virginia. This 115th Arbor Day celebration will be held Saturday, April 21 at 3 pm.

The public is invited to this FREE event, which will feature a reenactment of the first Arbor Day by The Falls Church Victorian Society. Guests will be updated on the Virginia Arbor Day Commons plan. "The Commons" commemorates the site of Virginia's first Arbor Day.

The Village Preservation and Improvement Society (VPIS) will present a generous donation to representatives from Mary Ellen Henderson Middle School, George Mason High School and the City of Falls Church. This donation shall be used for landscaping that will improve the environment and provide beauty to the school grounds.

Festivities will also include a presentation of

Falls Church's 29th consecutive Tree City, U.S.A. award by the National Arbor Day Foundation. The City of Falls Church was the first community in Virginia to be recognized as a Tree City and has the longest state record for this annual award.

We will also dedicate, as we do every year, the planting of trees in remembrance of VPIS members who passed away last year: Jerry Ziskind, Donald Hunt, and Col. Robert Herndon.

For more information, please call the City Arborist at 703-248-5183 (TTY 711).

**WHAT:** Arbor Day Celebration  
**WHEN:** Saturday, April 21, 2007  
**TIME:** 3 pm.  
**WHERE:** Frady Park  
300 Block of East Broad Street  
at Fairfax Street  
Falls Church, VA 22046