

The Village Way

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Membership Meetings Address Current City Issues

Last June, VPIS held its semi-annual membership meeting, which featured two fascinating panels. The first, led by local realtor Theresa Twiford, focused on the possibilities of construction of small detached homes surrounding a clubhouse on a relatively small parcel of land. This is a new construction concept gaining popularity that presents interesting possibilities.

At the second panel, the newest City Council members, Marybeth Connelly and Karen Oliver, spoke about the numerous challenges of their first six months on the Council. There were many interesting and thoughtful questions from the audience and we all got a much better idea of the complexity of issues facing new (indeed all) members of the Council.

We also presented Board member Seth Heminway the Virginia Village award for his many years of service directing the highly successful Neighborhood Tree Program VPIS runs with the City of Falls Church.

Our fall membership meeting is scheduled for **Sunday, November 9 at 3:00**. We plan to present two panels again. In the first, we will discuss the challenges facing the City in trying to maintain the amount of open space in the City in the face of increased development. In the second, we hope to have a member of the library staff discuss the plans for expansion of the library and its services. Both will be timely and interesting and as always, there will be plenty of time for questions, with refreshments to follow.

Watch your mail and the local paper for further details, including the venue. We hope to see many VPIS members, and members of the public, at the fall meeting.

Upcoming Events

Tree Planting, Saturday, October 18, 8:30—noon

Fall Membership Meeting, Sunday, November 9, 3:00

Tree Planting, Saturday, November 1, 8:30—noon

Tree Mulching, Saturday, November 15, 8:30—noon

Inside

President's Message.....	2
VPIS Comments on Broad and West Project.....	3
Walking Trails and the Future of Paper Streets	4
Summer Concerts at Cherry Hill Draw Crowds.....	5
Cataloging Notable Trees	6
Upcoming Neighborhood Tree Program Events.....	6
Start Saving Your Treasures	7
Coffee for Trees at Farmer's Market Booth.....	7

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and Improvement Society**

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Feel free to contact any Board member about

Society activities.

President's Message by Michael Connelly

What an honor and pleasure it has been to serve as President of VPIS over the past two years! As it has been since its origins decades ago, VPIS has continued to remain fully engaged in the life and goings-on of the City of Falls Church. From studying pending actions before the City Council and submitting position papers, to planting dozens of trees every spring and fall, to offering the delightful Concerts in the Park, I can say how proud I am to be associated with VPIS—this really is a vital group and important community asset!

I encourage you to attend the semi-annual membership meeting early in November. More information will follow, and you can always get details on our website, www.vpis.org. In addition to our topics of interest to folks in Falls Church, we will be electing a new President and additional members of the Board.

The Board and I encourage you all to remain active participants in our City's future. Over the past several years, we have all seen many changes to our Village, and more changes seem to be on the way—changes that not only alter the way our town looks, but also how it feels. My family and I have lived here just 20 years, yet the differences we've seen are dramatic, mostly for the better, but not always. There's a saying, "life is not spectator sport," and that could also be said about improving our City while at the same time working to preserve its unique character. You have shown, through your membership in VPIS, that you value the "feeling" of Falls Church. To help maintain that character, and pass it on to future generations, we encourage you to continue to participate actively, in the events that shape the future of our Village.

Thank you again for the opportunity to serve over these past two, quick-moving years. I look forward to seeing you at our meeting in a few weeks.

VPIS Comments on Broad and West Project

The VPIS Board of Directors recently responded to a request from the Falls Church City Council to comment on the proposed development at Broad and West Streets (currently known as Mason Row).

The Board noted that VPIS has supported using the prime property facing major arteries for commercial development and including some residential units in these projects. The Mason Row project can strengthen the City financially as well as provide social and cultural amenities. The Board feels that the current project proposal, however, needs to be improved in several significant ways prior to final approval. VPIS urged the Council to revise and strengthen the initial proposal in response to the concerns identified below. For a more detailed review of the project, see the full letter to the Council posted on the VPIS website, VPIS.org.

- 1. Increase Commercial/Retail Element of Project:** The City should press for a better balance between residential space (i.e., apartment/condominium space now at 73.5 percent of the project) and commercial space in the form of additional retail or office space. The City should set a goal of 50 percent commercial space at this location that is now zoned commercial in the City Comprehensive Plan and work to include a “retail anchor.”
- 2. Reduce Residential Density and Ratio of Bedrooms to Residential Unit:** The proposed project would include 320 residential units of which 67 are condominiums and 253 are apartments. To make space for the critical retail anchor and more retail and non-residential commercial space, the number of residential units should be reduced. In addition, the ratio of efficiency and one-bedroom units should be increased in order to reduce City costs and the long-term costs of school construction.
- 3. Expand Public Amenities/Market Square:** The “Market Square” is the only public amenity now proposed for the project and it is too small (50 feet by 50 feet; slightly larger than a tennis court) to be a viable public event or gathering space. This public space should be expanded into the currently planned Mason Lane space and widened. In addition, this public space should include trees and other natural features.
- 4. Clarify Economic Net Benefit Analysis and Impact on School Capital Costs:** The City should clarify the economic analysis of the project to more fully account for likely operational and capital costs related to schools. VPIS is especially concerned that the economic model does not adequately capture the long-term impacts of new residential units (and potential students) on projected school construction costs and thus exaggerates the estimate of financial benefits to the City. In addition, the per-unit one-time payment for school construction costs seems much too low given the school construction costs the City faces.
- 5. Increase Affordable Housing Units and Market to Lower Income Persons:** Although the developer has indicated that it will make 6 percent of the units in the project Affordable Dwelling Units (ADUs), the City Affordable Housing policy identifies 6 percent as a minimum for by-right developments. Given that this is a special exception project, rather than a by-right project, and there remains a critical need for affordable housing in the City, the City should request additional ADUs for the project.

Continued on page 4

6. Respect Park Avenue: The beautiful character of Park Avenue is recognized by residents as a great street. The primary characteristics of Park Avenue are the tree canopy, residential style setbacks, and the modest massing of building facing the street. All three of these characteristics should be maintained on this project.

Finally, the VPIS Board supports either of the names suggested at the Planning Commission meeting: Falls Church Station or Falls Church Depot.

The VPIS Board looks forward to working with the City to strengthen this proposal and to the successful implementation of a project that provides a major building block of the vibrant, walkable, and livable City of Falls Church.

Walking Trails and the Future of Paper Streets

In a recent letter to the City Council, the Board of Directors of VPIS requested the City Council to commit to City Ordinance the appropriate use of paper streets and trails as very valuable public assets.

A paper street exists only in the City's Master Plan. It is often unnamed and may or may not be paved.

A couple of recent incidents connected with development sites and the associated impact on the paper streets and a walking trail prompted this action. VPIS has long called attention to the important public value of the remaining paper streets and open space. This year we wrote the City Council endorsing the public statements of Kathy Chandler, Chair of the Parks and Recreation Advisory Board, on the issue of parks and the importance of open spaces. Walking trails that are "off street" act like linear parks and provide for an enhanced quality of place that sidewalks cannot provide. They are also connectors and provide the access that make Falls Church a more walkable and bicycle-friendly community. It is important to preserve these assets as the population density grows.

After the protracted Rothsay Street incident (end of North Lee Street at the WO&D Trail), there was a general consensus that preserving the public ownership and potential of paper

streets and other small fragments of City property is a community value. They are important to preserve for their future value as the walking trails and connectors that the City and we as a community desire. They may be used for future utilities currently unknown, for storm water and other utility junction areas. They are also important for the City to leverage important changes to development that are advantageous to the public. Even small pieces of land have proven instrumental in the past as levers to advance public goals.

By enacting ordinances, the City Council can ensure these policies will be maintained for future generations. The full text of the letter can be seen on the website VPIS.org.



Photo courtesy of Carol Sly.

Summer Concerts at Cherry Hill Draw Crowds

Great music returned to Cherry Hill Park for the 22nd consecutive year of the VPIS-sponsored summer concert series. This year's bands included the Falls Church Concert Band, Andrew Acosta, Tom Principato, Bob Gibson's Big Band, Veronneau, MSJ Project, and Big Tow.

Attendance varied between 150 and 500 per concert with about 1900 total attendees. The weather was perfect except on one night when we had to move indoors for the first time since 2010, to the intimate setting of the Senior Center room in the Community Center.

The City of Falls Church Recreation and Parks Department provided an excellent venue in Cherry Hill Park. Special thanks to the staff, most notably Amy Maltese and William Karsbo, for providing the logistics needed to pull off our free concerts.



The crowd enjoys a summer concert in Cherry Hill Park. Photo courtesy of Carol Sly.

Also, thanks to the VPIS volunteers who helped make the concerts happen. Staffing the drink sales were Bonnie Murphy and Mike and Margaret Volpe. Attending to the sound system and the bands were Jon Hundley, Dave Divecha, Tom Bowman, and Henry Lowman.

The Falls Church Victorian Society again sold ice cream and newcomer Chef Bonita Woods Wellness Institute sold gluten-free dinner items and snacks.

Gordon Theisz is already busy planning next year's line-up and checking the Farmer's Almanac for weather reports. If you would like to volunteer to help put on the Thursday night concerts, please email Gordon at gtheisz@verizon.net.



The barn at Cherry Hill Park makes a great sound stage. Photo courtesy of Carol Sly.

Upcoming Neighborhood Tree Program Events

The Neighborhood Tree Program is a partnership between the City of Falls Church, the Village Preservation and Improvement Society, and volunteers to help restore and maintain a healthy tree canopy. This program operates at no cost to City residents to receive a tree. Our focus is twofold.

First, we strive to educate residents about the benefits of trees and to encourage them to take an active role in caring for trees. Second, we collect donations through beverage sales at the Farmer's Market and Summer Concerts and from proceeds of the Attic Treasures Sale. These funds allow us to purchase and plant native shade trees near streets and sidewalks to cool our community and make it a more inviting place to walk, bike, and interact with our neighbors. Shade trees are planted within 15 feet of the curb, using volunteer labor coupled with logistical support from the City's tree professionals at no cost to the landowner. This is a great opportunity to volunteer a short amount of time that makes a big difference. Please join us.

Cataloging Notable Trees

For many years, VPIS has been identifying noteworthy or specimen trees, and with the homeowner's permission, tagging them with metal plaques attached to the tree. (VPIS now uses ground plaques to recognize these trees.)

We are continuing to update the VPIS catalog of trees, last published in 1990. This catalog includes noteworthy, commemorative, and memorial specimens. VPIS has found that a large number of Falls Church's trees are in poor health and many have succumbed to the

Fall 2014 Neighborhood Tree Program Events

Tree Planting Event—Saturday **October 18**, 8:30–noon. Meet on Seaton Lane (223 Cameron Rd.) near the back entrance to TJ Elementary School.

Tree Planting Event—Saturday **November 1**, 8:30–noon. Meet on 603 N. Oak Street (base of hill leading to Mt. Daniel Elementary School).

Tree Mulching Event—Saturday **November 15**, 8:30–noon. Meet at Cherry Hill Park, 300 Park Avenue near the outdoor basketball court.

(Cancellation only in case of steady rain)

Contact: Seth Heminway,
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ravages of time, suspect placement, and development, thus contributing to a reduction of the overall vegetative canopy cover of our urban forest.

We are continuing to explore a public-private partnership with the City of Falls Church for a single, joint recognition program and we welcome ideas from the membership, especially about possible incentives for private property owners. Contact Dennis Szymanski via email at dennis.szymanski48@verizon.net.

Start Saving Your Treasures

The Attic Treasures Sale is the oldest and largest annual fundraising activity for VPIS. All of the funds go to community activities like the Neighborhood Tree Program and the Summer Concerts in the Park. The 48th Annual Attic Treasures Sale will be held at the Falls Church Community Center in the spring of 2015. To support this event, please set aside items to donate, and consider volunteering your time.

The event promotes sustainable living by re-using/recycling, and is a great time to meet many of your neighbors and friends. Over the course of the year, please set aside items in **clean, working order** whenever you clean out your attic, basement, or garage. We will put out a call for donations and volunteers early next year. For questions or suggestions, please e-mail Nisha Sensharma (nisen Sharma@gmail.com).



Attic Treasures is ready for business. Photo courtesy of Carol Sly.

Coffee for Trees at Farmer's Market Booth

We invite you to visit the VPIS booth at the Saturday Morning Farmer's Market; this has been our 20th year providing hot coffee and cold beverages to raise money for the Neighborhood Tree Program. If you've ever been to the Farmer's Market on a busy Saturday morning, you know that the VPIS booth is in the thick of it—definitely the place to be right here in the City of Falls Church. So come by and talk to the many volunteers who help run that booth from late April until late November.

And many thanks to the wonderful members who have been helping in 2014, including Pete Markham, Gail Wadsworth, Hunter Peil, Lili Vivanco, Jon Hundley, Marsha McMullin, Dave Johnson, Elizabeth Meade, Constance Meade, Sandy Tarpinian, Vicky Tsaparas, Peng Si Highnan, Gordon Theisz, Ciara Theisz, Pradeep Sensharma, Nancy Brandon, Barry Buschow, Mike Volpe, Mike Connolly, Keith Thurston, Peter Adriance, Cathy Thompson, Mark Gross (in his own way), and anyone I may have missed. We are grateful to each volunteer.

We are always looking for even more VPIS member involvement—so if you want to maximize your VPIS membership, do good for the environment, and be a part of a social and cultural phenomenon right here in Falls Church, join us at the VPIS “Coffee for Trees” booth.

The Village Preservation and Improvement Society (VPIS), originally founded in 1885, is an active non-profit citizen volunteer organization in the City of Falls Church, Virginia. The Society works to preserve our natural and built environment, historic structures and landmarks, and it promotes cultural activities. The 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 preserving and improving the City. Send donations, 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@VPIS.org. VPIS is an IRS approved 501(c)(3) not-for-profit organization. A financial statement is available upon written request.