



The Falls Church Village Preservation and Improvement Society

January 15, 2019

Mayor Tarter and Members of City Council
City of Falls Church
400 North Washington Street
Falls Church, VA 22046

SUBJ: Concern Regarding Lack of Public Input for City Projects

Dear Mayor Tarter and Members of City Council;

The Board of Directors of the Falls Church Village Preservation and Improvement Society (VPIS) is concerned about the process the City is using for the planning of the “Downtown City Park.” While we agree with the decision to preserve the parking area and focus on the park area, the lack of process has made it impossible to know whether we favor the new design. The plans for the final design have not been shown to the public, nor have there been a new site plan or public hearings that permit public input. Based on Council direction, all significant changes to city-owned parkland -- as is occurring with the downtown park -are to be part of the park master plan and be approved by the Planning Commission, after hearings permit public review and comment. In this instance, there is no justification for the City to proceed without those hearings.

This is not the first time in recent years that City projects have proceeded without the opportunities for public input. Many of the changes to City Hall were approved without, or after the public input sessions. Changes to the play and historic areas in Cherry Hill Park - the primary park in the City -- were not accorded hearings for public review. City staff in recent years have developed small area plans that could significantly alter the design and appearance of areas of the City’s commercial corridors abutting residential areas. Unlike the extensive public engagement and scrutiny traditionally given the Comprehensive Plan, some of these small area plans were never given meaningful public review, but nonetheless have become part of the design and development plans of the City. The redevelopment of the Child Development Center to the Thackrey Preschool was done without public hearings or site plan approval. The transportation hub that is proposed for the South Washington area has had various iterations and is under serious consideration by City staff yet, to our knowledge, none of those plans has gone through the public review process, nor has that public review process been proposed.

This trend toward fewer opportunities to see and comment on projects will diminish a very positive aspect of living here, specifically Falls Church residents’ conviction that they have the power to affect the look and quality of life in our immediate community. The Board of Directors

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of VPIS encourages the City Council to consider this harm, and to reverse this trend, as it plans the review process for these and future projects.

Sincerely,

Lisa Varouxis, President
On Behalf of the Board of Directors
Village Preservation and Improvement Society