Falls Church Village Preservation and Improvement Society

October 17, 2019

Mayor David Tarter and City of Falls Church Council Members
City Hall
303 Park Avenue
Falls Church, VA 22046

Subject: Rental and use of personal dockless modes of transportation

Dear Mayor Tarter and Members of Council:

The Board of Directors of the Village Preservation and Improvement Society has discussed the City's upcoming deliberations about permitting motorized scooters in the City of Falls Church. It is our understanding that under state law the City must take some regulatory action by January 1, 2020, in order to retain local authority to regulate the commercial use of motorized scooters in the future.

We have concerns about the rental use of personal dockless modes of transportation, particularly motorized vehicles like scooters, in the City right now. The first is public safety. When motorized vehicles like scooters are used on public sidewalks, there are safety concerns. Often the people using the scooters do not have experience using them. That increases the risk of injury to pedestrians on the sidewalks who may simply not able to move quickly enough to avoid an oncoming scooter or other personal vehicle. Many jurisdictions that have already permitted the wide use of motorized scooters have had these accidents occur. The hazards of the scooters to individuals might outweigh any benefit to the City and its residents.

Second, we are concerned that, unlike commercial rental bicycles, motorized scooters do not have to be returned to a dock in order to end the user's rental fee for the scooter. They can simply be turned off and left on the sidewalk. Jurisdictions that have already permitted the commercial use of motorized scooters, or other sorts of personal vehicles that do not have to be returned to a docking station, have found that the vehicles are often left on sidewalks when the renter is finished with them; the company then tries to collect all of them at the end of the day. While they remain on the sidewalk, however, they can block pedestrian use of the sidewalk, to include access to businesses, and are unsightly.

We urge the Council to enact legislation before January 1, 2020, to avoid falling under any default legislation that the state may pass. We would suggest the Council consider banning, for now, the commercial use of motorized scooters or other personal vehicles that do not have to be returned to a dock. It will benefit the City greatly to wait to see how motorized scooters and similar vehicles fare in other jurisdictions. There is no need to rush to permit their use here, when serious questions remain unanswered.

If the City cannot do that, we should enact limits on the use of these vehicles, particularly motorized ones. First, a commercial scooter should have a speed governor. Second, motorized scooters and similar vehicles should be used only in the bike lanes on any street in the City that has dedicated bike lanes. That may keep motorized scooters off the sidewalks in the areas where we have the most pedestrians. Third, any commercial business that wants to rent motorized scooters or similar vehicles in the City must designate a collection area to which renters must return the vehicles. That will help prevent renters from just leaving the vehicles on the sidewalks.

Passing such legislation before January 1, 2020, will allow the City to retain authority to pass other legislation and regulations later, once we and other jurisdictions have more experience with the use of these motorized vehicles. If the Council does not act now, the opportunity for later regulation will be lost.

Sincerely,

Lisa G. Varouxis

Lisa G. Varouxis, President
On behalf of the Board of Directors