Falls Church Village Preservation and Improvement Society

February 20, 2020

Mayor Tarter and Falls Church City Council Members
Falls Church City Hall
300 Park Avenue
Falls Church, VA 22046

Dear Mayor Tarter and Members of the City Council,

We understand that the City Council has endorsed efforts to provide additional affordable housing in the City of Falls Church, a critical need for our diverse population. We commend and support this objective, recognizing this will be a complex undertaking and will require careful research, thought and community participation.

We also understand that a City consultant has been asked to explore options for permitting *free-standing* accessory dwelling units in R1-A and R1-B low and medium density residential zones as part of this effort. This has been the subject of discussion and concern by the Board of Directors of VPIS.

Falls Church residents who purchased single-family homes in R1-A and R1-B districts relied in good faith on clear limits on construction and density to define and preserve their neighborhoods. Provisions for *attached* accessory dwelling units to accommodate owner-related senior citizens, on a special permit basis, have been a positive addition to the City ordinance, although their use to date has been limited. Any broadening of these provisions to permit *detached* accessory dwelling units would need to be carefully restricted to avoid negative impacts on residential neighborhoods, street parking and congestion, tree canopy and stormwater runoff. Without restricting inhabitants to 1-2 people per dwelling, the draw for young families also could increase the school system's enrollment and City expenses.

Arlington's experience indicates that free-standing accessory dwelling units are more likely to provide diversity in housing than low-cost, affordable housing. If they are rented out, unless the City establishes rent controls for these units, the rents most likely would be at market rates and depend on the size of the units.

The concept of providing affordable housing, if done well and responsibly, is of value. It must, however, be pursued carefully and with full knowledge and consideration of all the circumstances, both pro and con, surrounding any new housing concept. Any free-standing accessory dwelling units – if permitted -- would need to be carefully circumscribed in terms of lot size, maintenance of current coverage and setback requirements, the permissible size and habitation of any unit, and avoidance of market-based rentals or sale as stand-alone units in order to truly assist the City's senior citizens and enhance its affordable housing objectives.

Sincerely,

Lisa Varouxis

Lisa Varouxis, President
On behalf of the Board of Directors

Cc: Planning Commission
City Staff