



Village Preservation and Improvement Society

Falls Church City Council
Falls Church Planning Commission
300 Park Avenue
Falls Church City, VA 22046

July 29, 2020

Dear Mayor Tarter, Council Members, Chair Rankin, and Planning Commissioners:

The developers of the West End project graciously agreed to give the Board of Directors of the Village Preservation and Improvement Society a briefing on their proposal on Wednesday, July 8. The discussion was highly informative and much appreciated by the members of the Board. Following that discussion, we have several observations about the plan we ask you to consider during further negotiations and discussions.

1. The plan seems to have very little in the way of open space, and particularly of open green space. The pedestrian corridor running through the plan will be genuinely nice and inviting for people walking around the shopping areas. However, other than the streetscape plan running along Broad Street, there is little in the way of other open space in the project, and extraordinarily little in the way of planting areas. We urge you to discuss with the developers whether there are additional opportunities to provide more open space, and particularly planting areas, in this project. For example, the long narrow area currently designated as "Lane 4" could be integrated into the "grove" or converted to a green forecourt for the music school.
2. The eastern facing section is imposing. Although there are windows in the upper parts of the building, it still presents a large wall. Perhaps the developer can consider more openings in that wall to soften the current fortress-like look.
3. The plan calls for a grocery store at the corner of Haycock Road and Broad Street. The City already has three large grocery stores – Giant (right across Haycock), Aldi and Harris Teeter. Currently there are plans for a Whole Foods to open at the downtown intersection, making four groceries. Unless this is a specialty grocery store, adding a fifth general grocery seems overkill, and does nothing to add to new shopping opportunities residents of Falls Church were expecting with this development.
4. We had a lot of discussions about the parking plans for the development. It appears there may be as little as one car space per apartment. Even though Metro is close by, allowing only one space per apartment in this day and age invites parking problems for residents. It would be very bad for overflow parking to end up in the school lot, or in the lot where the Giant now is, or on other commercial lots or residential streets in this area. All are very possible if there is not enough parking.
5. We were also a bit disappointed to hear that the parking for shopping is paid parking. While it is true that some people may come to this development to shop on Metro, we anticipate that the vast majority of shoppers will be driving here, as they do for most shopping areas. Having paid parking seems to be a serious deterrent for people to come here, as there is so much shopping in this area where parking is free. Is paid parking really a financial necessity for this project to succeed?

6. While many of the designs of the buildings are attractive, we would still like to see a bit more red brick used where possible to tie the design to the design of some of these new buildings to the brick appearance of the City's municipal buildings. That will help tie this development to the City.

7. There is little in the way of play areas for children. Undoubtedly, there will be children living in these apartments, as past experience in Falls Church well establishes that, and the plan calls for day care, where play areas are necessary. The closest City Park is the West End Park, quite a walk away for small children. The City should consider requiring that parking structure roofs be used for park and playground space available to any City resident.

8. We encourage you to direct the developer to work closely with the Falls Church Arts and Humanities Council in choosing the arts and murals that will go on the buildings and in the development. We would like to see the developer provide some art that ties into the history of Falls Church, further tying the development into our City, in which it is located.

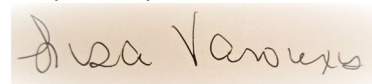
9. The Falls Church community is increasingly concerned about social justice and the availability of affordable housing. With the need to strengthen affordable housing options, the City should adjust the voluntary concession for the project to require that, as a minimum, six (6) percent of the units be affordable (i.e.; remove the option to make a payment to the city in lieu of a unit) and clarify that these affordable units will be available in perpetuity.

10. We like the idea of a development that is designed for all ages, from the daycare center through the high school and the senior living apartments. The plan, however, does not seem to have any tie-in to the adjoining high school campus. Is that intentional?

11. Modify the third bullet item under Uses in the Voluntary Concessions to state the minimum of 20,000 GSF of programmable civic space, managed by the Owner and which includes approximately 8,000 to 12,000 GSF event space including a 4,000 GSF outdoor rooftop terrace will be available in perpetuity; i.e. never to be developed for retail, residential or other non-civic use. This should be true of the additional 4,000 to 8,000 GSF identified as being occupied by performing arts/education studio or school.

12. We would like to hear more about the developers' "Dark Skies" plan, both internal and external to the project.

Respectfully,



Lisa Varouxis, President
On behalf of the Board of Directors
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