



The Falls Church Village Preservation and Improvement Society

September 15, 2021

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

Subject: Citizen Concerns About Green Space Management in the City

Dear Mayor Tarter and Members of City Council:

The Village Preservation and Improvement Society (VPIS) takes pride in supporting healthful and beautiful City parks, public gardens, and rain gardens. We are concerned, however, that recent changes in City staff organization and responsibilities may be compromising the requisite management of our current parks and greenspaces. We are concerned, too, that this situation may not bode well for the City's management of future parks and greenspaces arising out of new development projects.

To address this issue, we request that the City:

- 1) Reinstate funding for an Urban Forester position to assist the Arborist.** This position was argued for successfully by the City's previous Arborist Katherine Reich and was held by Charles Prince prior to his promotion to Arborist. However, Public Works reallocated this position.
- 2) Evaluate the true staffing needs to meet current and future parks and greenspaces management and hire accordingly.** The current staffing situation is not adequate. Doubling the Urban Forestry Crew from two to at least four would seem a minimum staffing level so that there are staff dedicated for parks management.

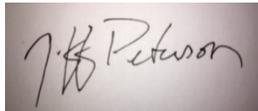
We understand that the City is in the process of hiring two new Urban Forestry Crew staff to replace the Greenspace crew who resigned in June 2021. The previous crew operated as a semi-autonomous unit within Public Works and effectively facilitated public volunteers in the parks. In 2020 alone, volunteers gave 1,000 hours in caring for our parks. The new Urban Forestry Crew has been reorganized directly under the City Arborist and once hired their priority will be to tackle a serious backlog of tree maintenance on public streets. The workload on the City Arborist has increased three-fold with this new reorganization. The Arborist must now oversee contract work for park and rain garden management, time consuming tasks that compete with his responsibility to care for and grow the City's tree canopy.

Increasing rainfall and temperature in our local environment, amplified by climate change, are providing ideal conditions for invasive and aggressive plants to overtake our carefully curated and necessarily managed parks and greenspaces. Invasive plants and weeds are proliferating in the parks' landscape beds; ivy is rapidly taking over the bordering tall trees; the new native plant gardens in the long-awaited Big Chimney's Park renovation and the newly replanted VPIS Presidential and Tricentennial Gardens are already overrun; and the City's rain garden sites are not being maintained to the point that their intended function may be affected.

We support and appreciate the attention that the City is placing on stormwater, affordable housing, and equity issues, along with the immense effort required in reviewing the new economic development efforts. However, we request that Council strongly press City management to assure that equal attention is paid to sustaining City parks, gardens and public greenspaces, which are the backbone of the City's green infrastructure and support the health of our residents. The City does not appear to be short of finances and can certainly devote more of them to create employment opportunities to maintain our beautiful and vital natural resources and advance our community's environmental stewardship.

Thank you for your help with this important challenge.

Sincerely,

A rectangular box containing a handwritten signature in black ink. The signature appears to read "Jeff Peterson".

Jeff Peterson, President of VPIS

CC:

Andrew Young, Chair, Environmental Sustainability Council

Kate Walker, Staff Liaison, Environmental Sustainability Council

Brent Kasner, Chair, Planning Commission

Paul Stoddard, Staff Liaison, Planning Commission

Charley O'Hara, Chair, Recreation and Parks Advisory Board

Daniel Schlitt, Staff Liaison, Recreation and Parks Advisory Board

Kathleen Philpott Costa, Chair, Urban Forestry Commission

Charles Prince, Staff Liaison, Urban Forestry Commission

Wyatt Shields, City Manager



Madison Park – Porcelain berry overtaking native goldenrod. (Sept 2021)



Cavalier Trail Park – Invasive bamboo and Japanese knotweed. (Aug 2021)



VPIS Presidents Garden - Broad St under bike bridge. (Aug 2021)



Near West End Park (Aug 2021)