



The Falls Church Village Preservation and Improvement Society

October 16, 2021

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

Subject: VPIS Review of the Founders Row II Project

Dear Mayor Tarter and Members of City Council:

The Village Preservation and Improvement Society (VPIS) welcomes the opportunity to comment on proposed mixed-use development projects as they move through the Council process. While we would have appreciated more uniform Council confidence in the key elements of this project prior to referral to Boards and Commissions, we share Council and City staff perceptions that substantial additional measures are still needed to make this a project we can all endorse.

Key issues that need to be addressed include:

- too much residential and no commercial lynchpin, with low net fiscal benefit;
- further stress on aging and failing infrastructure (roads and water) in nearby neighborhoods;
- stronger commitments for schools, parks, and library;
- a clear need for 15% greenspace and tree canopy; and
- additional attention to green infrastructure, EV stations/conduit, reducing greenhouse gases.

Continued progress toward completing the theater and retail commitments for Founders Row I is also essential to progress here.

Problem Areas:

- (1) In particular, the commercial component of this project, at 6%, remains extremely low compared to other recently approved projects, and the residential component, at 280 units, appears top-heavy for a project of this size. We recognize that the height of the building has been reduced from the initial proposal, and its approach to the neighbors

on Ellison Street has been tempered to a height of 30 feet, both of which are commendable. But there is no clear anchor for the commercial component, or strength in the still uncertain retail elements as a rationale for the project's contribution to the community. Moreover, the projected annual net fiscal benefits for the City, which currently range from \$145,000 to \$454,000, depending on the assumed student ratios, are not in themselves convincing.

(2) This project will exacerbate current road and water infrastructure problems in this area:

- A primary residential entrance on South West Street will further tax that overused section of road, with both the through and left turn lanes approaching W. Broad constantly queued almost to Ellison Street.
- Left turns out of this entrance could not be accommodated with the existing capacity of South West Street.
- A second entrance on West Broad Street will also create significant problems unless it is right in/out only. Oncoming traffic seeking to turn left on West is already backed up, often to the City line.
- Failing water infrastructure has resulted in dozens of water main breaks in the surrounding neighborhoods. Water main replacement to meet the increased demand would cause considerable disruption.

(3) We do welcome the intent to offer 12% affordable dwelling units within the project, but would encourage strong commitments for the City's schools, parks and library more in line with most earlier projects, as well. There is a tendency to place a dollar value on elements that are essential components of a viable project, rather than focusing on contributions that recognize that new residents also come with increased costs for public services and that strive to enhance the life of those who live here.

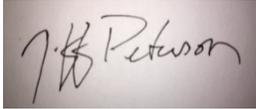
(4) Regarding the project's environmental elements, we share others' interest in achieving a strong 15% greenspace and tree canopy, including expanded area for green solar roofs, particularly in light of losing all of the area's mature trees. The side plaza is an attractive idea, but would do well with softer landscaping elements.

(5) The LEED Gold objective is similarly laudable, as is the proposed all-electric building. Yet we would encourage additional attention to green infrastructure, more electrical vehicle charging stations and conduit, and further efforts to reduce greenhouse gases to reflect the need to adjust to continuing climate change.

On balance, this project still lacks a strong “raison d’etre” for both the nearby neighbors and the Falls Church community as a whole. We don’t need more apartments simply for the sake of more apartments, but buildings that attractively complement both the existing and the new in Falls Church, while meeting current needs and contributing toward a better City for all.

We look forward to working with you to improve this proposed project.

Sincerely,

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

Jeff Peterson

On behalf of the Board

Village Preservation and Improvement Society

cc: Planning Commission
Planning Director