



The Falls Church Village Preservation and Improvement Society

May 6, 2022

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

Subject: Consideration of Zoning Code Amendments to Transitional Zones (T-1 and T2)

Dear Mayor Tarter and Members of the City Council:

The Board of the Village Preservation and Improvement Society (VPIS) is writing to comment on the City's proposals to revise the zoning code regarding Transitional Zoning Districts (T-1 and T-2) discussed at the April 4 City Council work session.

Falls Church prides itself on public input and involvement. We are concerned that detailed changes to one element of the zoning code have been presented to Council without consideration by the Planning Commission. The Planning Commission should be involved in the early stages of any process considering zoning code changes. City code provides a unique and central role for the Planning Commission in zoning code revisions, including the responsibility to hold a hearing on any proposed changes (see City code 48-86(a)). In addition, the Council discussed the proposed changes and asked for revisions without also asking that the staff develop a schedule that follows the conventional process of consideration of zoning code changes described in the City code.

A more deliberative process will allow diverse interests to consider the goals of any proposed zoning code changes, whether desired goals might better be achieved through other or additional means, and what the advantages and disadvantages of proposed code changes or other measures may be. VPIS strongly urges the Council and Planning Commission to engage the public in consideration of goals and options and, if changes to the zoning code are needed, to adhere to the procedures for amendment now in the code. VPIS looks forward to engaging in that process.

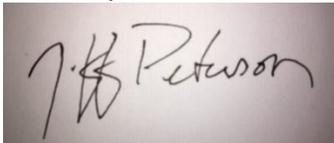
The VPIS Board has not adopted a position on potential changes to Transition zones but will do so when a formal proposal is offered for public comment. The Board, however, is concerned that the City proposal would significantly weaken the important function of the current Transition zones, which is to provide residential areas with an effective buffer from taller, denser commercial areas. Some concerns with this initial staff proposal that need wider discussion include:

- Increase in building heights from 35 to 50 feet;
- Reduction of building setbacks to as little as 5 feet;
- Increase in allowed lot coverage from 40 to 80 percent;
- Reduction in public input to proposed projects;
- Lack of a requirement to notify adjoining property owners of proposed projects; and
- Reduction in onsite parking requirements.

These changes to existing Transition zones have the potential to displace existing uses and businesses, generate environmental impacts, and undermine a harmonious transition between lower intensity residential areas and higher intensity commercial areas.

We look forward to working with you to define policy goals and review implementation options, including changes to the zoning code, through a process that engages City staff, the Planning Commission, and the public.

Sincerely,

A rectangular image showing a handwritten signature in black ink on a light-colored background. The signature appears to read "Jeff Peterson".

Jeff Peterson
VPIS President
On behalf of the Board

cc: City Manager
Planning Commission