



**The Falls Church Village Preservation and Improvement Society**

September 26, 2022

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

**Subject: Park Avenue “Great Street” Project 30% Design Concerns**

Dear Mayor Tarter and Members of Council:

The Board of Directors of The Village Preservation and Improvement Society (VPIS) applauds the concept of making Park Avenue a “Great Street”.

Although there are several very valuable elements of the initial design, such as power line undergrounding and bicycle friendly improvements, we have several concerns with specific details of plan. Based on review of available materials and attending the walking tour, we have the following comments and recommendations for improvements:

1. Park Avenue is not the place for the Farmers Market;
2. plans for a plaza in front of City Hall are a major mistake;
3. project costs and City funding sources need to be disclosed;
4. proposed bollards and flush curbs are poor design;
5. curb bulbouts are too large as proposed;
6. more trees are needed and alignment with lamp poles;
7. keep lighting gentle; and
8. avoid visual pollution of more signage.

More information and explanation of these comments is provided below.

- 1. Park Avenue Is Not the Place for the Farmers Market:** The proposal to relocate the Saturday morning Farmers Market is impractical and will degrade the widely appreciated Farmers Market experience. Specific concerns with the proposed move of the market include:

- the existing Park Avenue width is not nearly wide enough to accommodate the Farmers Market as operated in the City Hall lot (i.e., it is not large enough);
- it will not add significant space for more vendors;
- it will block the entry to two major commercial parking lots used for the Farmers Market, leaving the shoppers with a shortage of places to park and a net-negative number of parking spaces;
- two separate informal polls of Farmers Market vendors found none that support it, most saying the existing configuration works well, so why change it?
- the current shade from tree canopy is appreciated by market vendors;
- people like the interesting quirks of the current walk through and see the straight line of vendors on the road as not desirable; and
- it will block Park Avenue from other traffic (note that some of the medical building offices have Saturday hours).

- 2. Plans for a Plaza in Front of City Hall are a Major Mistake:** We strongly oppose the idea of a new plaza in front of City Hall. The City Hall building is in a park setting and people love that. It is one of the things that makes Falls Church a unique place. The treed area provides a respite of green that is not improved with hardscape. Plazas without a purpose quickly become eyesores. Additionally, a plaza would be a loss of tree canopy and addition of hot hardscape at a time when we need to do the opposite. To remove some of that grove of trees to create a vanity view of City Hall would be a desecration.
- 3. Project Costs and City Funding Sources Need to be Disclosed:** We understand that the projected cost of this plan is almost twice the amount of the grant received (i.e., \$11.5M cost with \$6.6M grant). Because construction is not expected until 2028-2030, it seems likely that the project cost will increase, perhaps substantially.

The City should provide basic budget information about the project (e.g., cost of key elements such as undergrounding utilities and a City Hall Plaza), a contingency to cover both unexpected costs and inflation, and a description of how the City share of costs will be funded (e.g., Capital Improvement Plan or other sources).

In addition, an \$11.5M project addressing just three blocks is expensive (i.e., almost \$4M per block). We believe some of that cost is in elements that should be eliminated such as flush curbs, bollards, oversized bulbouts, and the City Hall plaza. The City should work to bring the project cost closer to the amount of the grant and either save this money or use it for improvements to Park Avenue blocks west of the proposed project.

**4. Proposed Bollards and Flush Curbs are Poor Design:** The bollards were included in the design with the Farmers Market in mind and are not needed in the event that the market stays in front of City Hall as we recommend. Bollards will also add visual clutter to the ambiance of the park like setting. Flush curbs at the intersections, aside from ADA crosswalks, will cause confusion of the various modalities and travel paths unnecessarily. They also add to visual pollution to an area that should appear to be simple and not over-engineered.

**5. Curb Bulbouts are Too Large as Proposed:** Some prior City bulbouts have narrowed the streets as to make it dangerous for vehicles turning (e.g., Lee Street at Broad Street). A single outbound car makes it very tight for any inbound traffic. A single truck entering or trying to turn will cause a multiple street traffic stoppage.

The temporary markings for bulbouts now on Park Avenue are evidence that they are too large even for a small car. Turning right from Park onto North. Maple towards Broad Street, even a small car (Mini and Prius) cannot navigate the turn without going into the lane of opposing traffic. The bulbouts need to be reduced in size.

**6. More Trees Are Needed and Alignment with Lamp Poles:** All of the trees should be aligned for the whole block and all lamp poles should each be aligned for the whole block without misalignments due to bulbouts on corners or midblock. Shifting alignments is a significant visual distraction. With trees on bulbouts only, it provides 3 or 4 trees per block less than one-third of what is needed to meet a goal of a tree every 40 feet. A street without a tree canopy can not be a great street. The placement of trees needs to be reconsidered and the number expanded.

**7. Keep Lighting Gentle:** The lighting should be planned to be consistent with the 600 and 700 blocks of Park Avenue. The very bright lighting of the over-lit area around the library destroys ambiance and the good feeling that is compatible with the adjacent residential neighborhoods and needed for the Great Street. Lighting around the Library should become compatible with the rest of Park Avenue.

**8. Avoid Visual Pollution of More Signage:** Travel on the current 100 and 200 blocks of Park Avenue currently provides a visual clutter of signage – mostly parking restrictions. We must conceive a better way to convey needed information less obtrusively to have a Great Street (e.g., pavement markings). Initial Great Street plans should be reviewed to minimize excessive signs and the resulting visual clutter. In addition, we do not support entrance columns for Park Avenue.

We recognize that the implementation of the Great Street Plan will take many years. We recommend that, as the City proceeds with this work, it should develop Streetscape plans for the parts of Park Avenue not being addressed in this initial effort (the proposed Great Street plan (i.e., west of the Library) in order to give developers a guide to build to. Currently Founders Row is now complete with a brand-new block of sidewalk that does not fit the future vision of Park Avenue. As a case in point, Founders Row did not extend the ambiance of Park Avenue but undermines it by a lack of appropriate setbacks, excessive heights, and too much lighting.

Finally, Park Avenue already has elements of a Great Street, including the visual appeal of the tree canopy, modest building sizes, compatible setbacks on both sides, small post signage, and low night-time lighting. All these features make it compatible to the adjoining residential neighborhoods. The City should be careful that further improvements do not reduce the existing appeal. The adjustments to the initial Great Street plan that we recommend will avoid undermining what is already great about Park Avenue while making appropriate upgrades.

Sincerely,

A rectangular box containing a handwritten signature in black ink. The signature appears to read "Jeff Peterson" in a cursive, slightly stylized script.

Jeff Peterson  
VPIS President  
on behalf of the Board of Directors

Cc: City Manager  
Planning Director  
Planning Commission  
Citizens Advisory Committee on Transportation  
Environmental Sustainability Council