



The Falls Church Village Preservation and Improvement Society

September 16, 2022

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

Subject: VPIS Opposition to Proposed Amendments to Transitional Zones

Dear Mayor Tarter and Members of the City Council:

In early May of this year, the Board of the Village Preservation and Improvement Society sent a [letter to City Council](#) requesting that City staff work with the Planning Commission as required by City Code (see City code 48-86(a)) and engage the public prior to movement on the proposed zoning code changes to reduce the protection provided by the City's transition (T-1, T-2) zones. Transition zones are intended to provide a buffer between developed areas of the City and residential areas.

Council nevertheless passed an amended version of the proposed zoning changes on May 23, with the promise that neighbors and the public at large would be notified and engaged in the process following first reading. To date, there has been no outreach to the public or engagement of the Planning Commission. **This letter reiterates our request that the City follow established processes for revision of the zoning code, including engaging the Planning Commission, and announce a more affirmative plan to engage the public.**

A key issue lending confusion to the current proposal remains: what is the problem this legislation is trying to address? Based on various news reports and comments from City officials, we understand that the proposed reductions to protections provided by transition zones are expected to achieve greater diversity in housing than is currently available, including enhancement of housing directed primarily for the "missing middle". **We recommend that the City officially explain the goal of changes to transition zones, including defining the income levels of persons the changes are intended to benefit.**

If the City seeks to expand housing options for a particular income group, it should also explain how zoning amendments will serve the purpose and evaluate a range of measures other than zoning amendments that might accomplish the goal. It is not likely that housing built in revised transition zones will benefit middle or lower-income people (i.e., what will prevent developers from pricing these units for high incomes?).

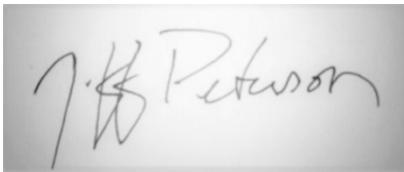
As explained in our May letter, proposed changes to existing transition zones will be both a burden and cost to existing City homeowners nearby these zones. For example, proposed reduced setbacks will reduce resale of existing homes values and increased lot coverage will contribute to greater stormwater runoff and flooding. Existing homeowners have often lived here for years and rely on the City's zoning code for protection of their investment. The City should clearly explain what benefits will be accomplished in exchange for current residents bearing these new burdens. The City also should explain why alternative measures or policies, other than zoning amendments, could not better meet its goals.

Without a compelling case that the proposed Transition zone changes will effectively serve an important public purpose, and that the burdens imposed on existing residents and the environment are proportionate to the public benefits, VPIS opposes the proposed changes.

Finally, the VPIS Board understands that the proposed changes to transition zones would benefit persons currently holding positions of responsibility with the City. Given the potential for financial gain or loss to both developers and existing residents, **we recommend that the City Attorney review the existing City conflict of interest policies and provide all parties with guidance to assure that these policies are fully and fairly implemented in this case and that any appropriate recusals are in place.**

We look forward to working with you on this important topic.

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 VPIS Board

cc: Planning Commission
City Attorney
City Manager