The Falls Church Village Preservation and Improvement Society

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

May 30, 2023

Subject: Public Participation in the Park Avenue "Great Streets" Project

Dear Mayor Tarter and Members of the City Council:

The Board of the Village Preservation and Improvement Society (VPIS) urges you to direct the City staff to rescind its submission to VDOT of the "60% design" plan for the $11 million Park Avenue "Great Streets" public works project so that there can be appropriate public input on this major works project. Park Avenue is a beloved street at the heart of our civic life. We are deeply concerned that City staff submitted a 60% plan to VDOT for Park Avenue's "transformation" without adequate public notice or involvement, even after City Council members urged opportunities for greater public input.

We recognize the need for better sidewalks with fewer obstructions along parts of Park Avenue, but the public raised major areas of concern on other matters during the August 2022 "30% design walking tour." These concerns included (1) spillover traffic effects in surrounding neighborhood roads, (2) the economic impact on small businesses during construction, (3) the loss of mature trees that give character and provide invaluable environmental benefits, (4) funding and maintenance costs, and (5) the failure to provide any designated bike lanes. After the walking tour, City Council members urged more public outreach and more public meetings given the initial public feedback. Instead, City staff submitted the "60% design" to VDOT without notifying Council in advance, even after acknowledging that, once approved, the 60% design finalizes right-of-way decisions. The 60% plan was made public only after it had been submitted—the public had no opportunity to review or comment on the plan.

Falls Church residents are well-informed and care deeply about the future of our city. They deserve to be given a meaningful chance to review and be heard on important projects shaping civic life—and not belatedly told of virtually final City action only after City staff and the City's design contractor (Volkert, Inc.) have already decided the major questions. The 60% VDOT

submission should be rescinded so that the public can shape the future of the civic heart of Falls Church.

In addition to rescinding the submission, the City should schedule a public meeting to obtain public comment and provide the "60% design" to the public. The responsible people — including the contractors from Volkert, City planning staff, the City Manager and Council members—must be present to address the major issues related to this significant project. The City also should include a detailed breakdown of the funding sources, including any local funds and principal expenses, that comprise the $11 million total cost.

Sincerely,

Mark Gross
VPIS President
on behalf of the VPIS Board

cc: City Manager