The Falls Church Village Preservation and Improvement Society

March 18, 2024

City Manager Wyatt Shields
City of Falls Church
300 Park Avenue
Falls Church, VA 22046

Subject: Support for FY 2025 Funding for RainSmart Program

Dear Mr. Shields:

The Board of Directors of the Village Preservation and Improvement Society (VPIS) appreciates your support for the RainSmart program over many years. We are writing to strongly urge you to propose as part of the FY2025 City budget the full amount (i.e., $10,000) authorized under the Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) between the City and VPIS for implementation of the RainSmart Program. In addition, VPIS seeks your approval of amendments to the MOU to improve the operation of the program.

Since 2018, the RainSmart program has provided stormwater management education and grants to City residents for the purchase of rain barrels and installation of stormwater management practices, such as rain gardens and conservation landscapes. Through the support of almost one hundred rain barrels and over a dozen stormwater management projects, the program has contributed to improved stormwater management in the City.

Looking forward to FY 2025, the continued success of the RainSmart program depends on the inclusion in the City budget of funds sufficient to support the full $10,000 authorized in the 2018 MOU and several amendments to the MOU. VPIS proposes two MOU amendments:

- An increase in the amount of rain barrel grants from $50 to $60 to account for the erosion in the value of the grant due to inflation since 2018.
- An increase in the maximum amount of a grant for installation of stormwater management practices from $1,500 to $2,000 to account for significant increases in the costs of landscape design and installation.

As you know, the RainSmart program has not generally used the full amount authorized by the MOU in past years. Recently, the limited amount of the grant support for each project has provided a reduced incentive for the development of projects that now cost considerably more than the amount of the grant. Increasing the grant amounts as proposed will restore the grant/private funding ratio that existed in the early years of the program. This is likely to result in an increased number of approved projects and a need for the full amount authorized by the MOU.

In addition, the RainSmart program involves engagement with numerous potential project grant applicants and each applicant wants to know if sufficient funds are available to support a grant or whether they will develop a project only to find that funds are not available. Reduced funding for the program means that only a few potential applicants can be in the project pipeline at a time and some applicants are discouraged when told that funding for their project is uncertain. Full funding means that more applicants can be in the project development pipeline and more projects will ultimately be approved.

Finally, we appreciate that the City has discussed participating in the Northern Virginia Soil and Water Conservation District (NVSWCD). We strongly encourage the City to finalize an MOU with NVSWCD. We believe, however, that the NVSWCD program is not a substitute for the RainSmart program and that the two programs operating together will provide City residents with the full range of options needed to support expanded stormwater management practices.

Thank you for your attention to this important matter. Please contact Jeff Peterson, VPIS RainSmart coordinator, if you have questions.

Sincerely,

Mark Gross
VPIS President
on behalf of the Board of Directors