

MINUTES - DRAFT
City of Alexandria, Virginia
AD HOC OPEN SPACE STEERING COMMITTEE
Community Meeting
Patrick Henry Recreation Center
Thursday, September 22, 2022
7:00 p.m.

Open Space Steering Committee Members

Present:

Kaitlyn Blume, Member-at-large

David Brown, Planning Commission

Martha Harris, Historic Alexandria Resources Commission Member

Kurt Moser, Northern Virginia Conservation Trust (NVCT) and Committee Co-Chair

Mike Olex, Environmental Policy Commission Member

Micheline Smith, One at-large member from the development community (Paradigm)

Denise Tennant, Beautification Commission Member and Committee Co-Chair

9/22 Excused

Barbara Marvin, Park and Recreation Commission Member

9/22 Absent

Tatiana Gutierrez, Member-at-large

Brandon Pinette, Member-at-large

Vacancy:

One at-large member from the business community

City Staff

Nathan Imm, Principal Planner, Planning and Zoning (P&Z)

Judy Lo, Acting Principal Planner, Park Planning Division, RPCA

Ana Vicinanza, Urban Planner III, Park Planning, RPCA

Bethany Znidersic, Landscape Architect, RPCA

Guests

Julia Deupree

Called to order

Kurt Moser called the meeting to order at 7:05 p.m.

Ellen Eggerton

Staff shared the sad news that Ellen Eggerton, the City's sustainability coordinator, had passed away. Condolences were expressed.

Administrative Tasks

PUBLIC COMMENTS

Comments were invited on non-agenda items. There were none.

Committee Task Updates

MEETING PRESENTATION at:

<https://www.alexandriava.gov/sites/default/files/2022-09/Open%20Space%20Steering%20Committee%20Meeting%20-%2009.22.2022.pdf>

APPROVAL OF JULY 14, 2022 MINUTES

MOTION: Olex moved and Blume seconded that the minutes be approved. ***Motion approved by unanimous voice vote.***

SCHEDULE AND NEXT STEPS

Staff reviewed the Steering Committee’s planned schedule through February 2023. Meeting locations are not yet set.

- **Current meeting:** Discussion and approval of Task 2 and “Sample design criteria” as a recommendation of the plan
- **Week of October 25** – Task 3. Staff will present their research related to contributions towards Open Space
- **Week of December 5 (tentative)** – Committee discussion of staff research on Task 3 and begin drafting of Open Space Contribution Options
- **Week of January 23 (tentative)** – Task 3 drafting
- **Week of February 20 (tentative)** - Adoption of Task 3

Discussion Items and Action

Task 2 - Develop criteria to be used for evaluating the City’s current and future open spaces, both natural and designed.

- **TASK 2 Presentation - Posted at:**
<https://www.alexandriava.gov/sites/default/files/2022-09/Open%20Space%20Steering%20Committee%20Meeting%20-%2009.22.2022.pdf>

DISCUSSION: DESIGN CRITERIA SAMPLE

- **NOTE: “Sample Design Assessment” as approved at the meeting is at:**
<https://www.alexandriava.gov/sites/default/files/2022-09/Design%20Criteria%20-%20Final%20Draft.pdf>

- **Revised draft** - Staff presented a revised “Sample Design Assessment” that incorporated Committee feedback at the July 2022 meeting. At that meeting staff proposed 10 design elements for evaluating the quality of publicly accessible open space.
 - **Rating scale** – Sample’s rating scale recognizes that judgements on design can be relatively subjective so staff proposed a 0-10 numerical rating scale to evaluate key open space design features.

- **Outside consultant proposed to finalize design criteria**
 - Staff is recommending the City hire a consultant to develop final design guidelines based on the criteria being developed by staff and the Open Space Steering Committee.
 - Staff’s goal is to avoid any perceived conflict of interest that might arise if City staff were to finalize the design criteria to be used by City staff when evaluating the City’s current and future open space designs.

- **Outside consultant proposed for an open space conditions assessment**
 - Staff also recommends a consultant be hired to conduct a conditions assessment of the City’s Open Space areas.

NOTE: No decision has been made whether the design criteria and conditions assessments will be part of the same study.

Committee Comments:

- **When designing criteria for OS types that vary greatly**
 - Criteria need to be appropriate for both natural and designed open spaces and for improving existing OS and assessing potential OS.
 - Final written design guidelines should specify that not all criteria are appropriate for all types of OS, e.g. an athletic field and a historical park have different needs.

- **Avoid excessive uniformity** - Criteria should be applied in a manner that produces variety among the City’s OS.

- **Proposed consultant studies – Estimated cost?**
 - **A:** Too early to predict cost of the studies being recommended by staff.
 - The City’s playspace assessment of playgrounds, presented to Council in October 2013, is the City’s only similar assessment of open spaces. Its cost, about \$40,000, was funded through a Kaiser grant. Information re: playspace policy is at:

<https://alexandria.legistar.com/LegislationDetail.aspx?ID=1490759&GUID=73D0373D-1F64-4DF7-B611-1460E423D7EA>

- **Can the design criteria’s ranking system reflect relative priorities for specific features?**
 - Should criteria be prioritized in tiers?
 - Can criteria be created that shows the relative importance of an OS site’s features such as environmental resilience, adequate signage and restrooms?
- **Cost considerations** - Some OS design flaws are simpler and less expensive to fix, e.g. signage vs. adding a public restroom.
- **Intended use(s) vs. needs** - Should design criteria reference results of a needs assessment?
 - A: citywide needs assessment is conducted every 2 years. The park improvement plan is updated every 10 years with inputs from the community re what additions or upgrades they feel are needed.

APPROVE DRAFT TASK 2 AND TASK 1 AMENDMENTS

MOTION: Sample Design Criteria

Olex moved and Blume seconded that the Steering Committee adopt the Sample Design Criteria document as a guide for the consultants who will be hired to develop the final design criteria document. *Motion passed by unanimous voice vote.*

REVIEW of TASK 2 ACCOMPLISHMENTS

- **Task 2: Evaluate methods of pursuing new publicly accessible open space.**

ASSIGNED AND COMPLETED:

- **Develop criteria for considering opportunities for open space acquisition through the Open Space Fund (such as connectivity, walkability to neighborhood needs, access to water, etc.)**
 - *Task accomplished by defining primary ways of acquiring publicly accessible OS and updating acquisition criteria*
- **Develop minimum open space criteria for small area plans based on current and future demographic needs and neighborhood characteristics.**
 - *Task accomplished by creating maps that identify gaps in the City’s open space system. This allows us to put additional focus and resources on addressing these “hot spot” areas within the City.*
- **Evaluate the Open Space Ratio and/or other targets based on national standards and benchmarks for localities with similar densities.**
 - *Task accomplished by using the four objectives identified in Task 1 for publicly accessible open space - (1) accessibility, (2) useability, (3) design, and (4) equity - to create assessments that measure the quality of the City’s open space.*

TASK 2 DOCUMENT DISCUSSION

- **Q: How are other communities are addressing the challenge of meeting the 7.3 acre ratio becoming more difficult to meet as a goal?**
 - A: National Recreation and Park and Association (NRPA) ¹ is moving toward quality assessments and away from the open space ratio of 7.3 acres per 1,000 residents towards quality assessments.
 - **Public Open Space Easements**
 - Need more specific language – (1) Clarify how proposed Open Space Easement differs from Publicly Accessible Open Space Easement using more specific language. (2) Language should specify that an easement’s use will be preserved when ownership of a property changes.
 - **A:** Goal is to distinguish between the purpose of an easement being granted as a public pathway on private property versus a public easement to be used for public park and recreation use.
 - **Above grade easements** - Above grade publicly accessible open space should only be considered when all other options have been exhausted. Above grade publicly accessible open space must be accessible to the public with clear signage indicating times and means of access. Above grade publicly accessible open space should not be used to justify higher density than is ordinarily permitted in the zone.
 - **Historic City resources** – Add them to the types of resources that the new Public Open Space easement can cover, with signage being used to publicize the site’s historic significance.
 - **Encourage green spaces in developments** - Encourage the preservation of existing green space when areas are redeveloped.

MOTION: Task 1 and 2 adopted.

Smith moved and Olex seconded that Task 1 and Task 2 be adopted with changes agreed to at the meeting. It was further agreed that Steering Committee can revisit Task 1 and 2 if needed. Motion was approved by unanimous voice vote.

- **NOTE:** Requested changes: (1) Add more specificity in information about public open space easements, e.g., make it more clear such easements are preserved when a property’s ownership changes and add preserving historic resources to this section; and (2) Add “when available at-grade open space is limited or of lower quality in a development plan then above-grade open space should be explored and encouraged

Next Steps: Task 3

¹ National Recreation and Park Association website: <https://www.nrpa.org/>

Task 3: Build on the work of the “Open Space in New Development” discussion, provide guidance for new development’s contribution to publicly accessible open space where it is not already guided by the small area plan, particularly to clarify:

- When new development is contributing to off-site publicly accessible open space;
- What they are contributing toward and;
- How a reasonable contribution from new development will be determined.

Next Meeting

Week of October 24. Date and location TBD.

Adjournment

At 8:20 p.m. Olex moved and Smith seconded that the meeting adjourn. Motion approved by unanimous voice vote.