



# DEVELOPMENT REVIEW PROCESS

Department of Planning & Zoning Development Division



## BACKGROUND + BASICS

All major development projects in the City of Alexandria go through a rigorous review process. The Planning and Zoning (P&Z) Department works to retain and enhance Alexandria's unique character and livability by ensuring that development proposals:

- Are consistent with the Master Plan and Zoning Ordinance
- Consist of the highest quality building design, urban design and site planning
- Provide an overall public benefit, and are responsive to community input and engagement

## GUIDING DOCUMENTS

The development review and approval process is reflective of the principles outlined in Alexandria's Master Plan chapters and Small Area Plans, Zoning Ordinance, and design guidelines that offer additional direction in designated areas.

### Master Plan and Small Area Plans

The Citywide Master Plan (1992) offers broad guidance for development and policy decisions, and is recurrently amended to reflect changes in Alexandria's development. Additional Citywide recommendations come from "element" master plans such as Housing (2013), Transportation (2008) and Open Space (2002). Small Area Plans (SAPs) outline the vision, goals, and policies for each area of the City, including how land should be used and neighborhoods, parks and buildings should be designed. Please see [alexandriava.gov/44614](http://alexandriava.gov/44614) for more info.

### Zoning Ordinance

The City's Zoning Ordinance directly regulates the size, placement and allowed uses of a specific property. The Ordinance also sets parameters for "Development Approvals and Procedures," (Article XI) which regulates applications for development.

### Design Guidelines and Additional Standards

Complementary to the City Zoning Ordinance are design guidelines that cover specific neighborhoods, commercial corridors and historic neighborhoods, in addition to general landscape and other topic-oriented guidelines. Please see [alexandriava.gov/14676](http://alexandriava.gov/14676) for more info.

## COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT & OUTREACH

The development review process incorporates extensive public outreach, with active participation from residents and civic groups.

### Development Project Meetings

Applicants are prompted to schedule public meetings with civic and neighborhood groups early in the development process. Staff works closely with the applicant team and stakeholders to provide opportunity for input before the project is presented to the Planning Commission and City Council.

### Design Review Boards

A project located in one of the City's two historic districts (Old & Historic Alexandria or Parker Gray) is reviewed by one of the corresponding Boards of Architectural Review (BAR). Each BAR provides a Certificate of Appropriateness (COA) to qualifying projects, stating BAR approval of the building's mass, scaling and architectural features. The BAR process proceeds concurrently with the City development review, and a COA must be approved prior to the release of the Final Site Plan.

Many development projects are also reviewed by design committees with jurisdiction over portions of the City. Applicants are asked to present their proposals to these committees and seek a potential endorsement that is sent to the Planning Commission. More information of these design committees for Beauregard, Carlyle / Eisenhower East, Old Town North and Potomac Yard can be found at [alexandriava.gov/14676](http://alexandriava.gov/14676).

## SUBMISSIONS

The most common development applications submitted to the City are a Development Site Plan (DSP) and a Development Special Use Permit with Site Plan (DSUP). Urban Planners in the P&Z Development Division serve as project managers for DSPs and DSUPs, and coordinate review among other City departments. The planner is the main contact for questions or concerns.

A **Development Site Plan (DSP)** is required for any development that:

- Contains three or more dwelling units
- Is a new building or addition that is 3,000 square feet or larger
- Provides a parking lot with five or more parking spaces
- Is an addition that is 1/3 or more of the existing gross square feet of the building
- Falls under other criteria listed in Section 11-400 of the Zoning Ordinance

DSPs provide information on building location and elevations, landscaping, lighting, open space, and other site amenities. Planning Commission holds a public hearing and takes final action. DSPs do not require review by the City Council.

A **Development Special Use Permit with Site Plan (DSUP)** is required for any development requiring a site plan and requesting approval of a Special Use Permit for:

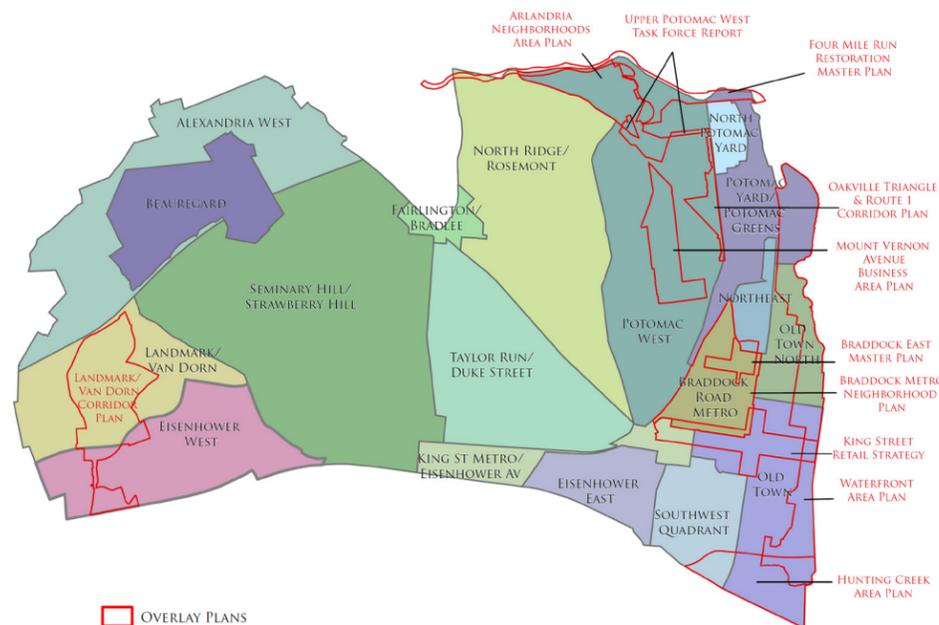
- A modification of the parking ratios
- A modification to the yard, landscape or open space requirements
- Increased building height or floor area ratio (FAR)
- Affordable housing bonus density
- Special requirements listed in the applicable zone in the Zoning Ordinance

DSUPs contain similar information to a DSP, but in greater detail and more discretion with standards for review. The Planning Commission hears requests for DSUPs at a public hearing and forwards a recommendation to the City Council. The City Council holds a public hearing and takes final action.

## CONTACT

- For information about proposed development projects, visit [alexandriava.gov/Development](http://alexandriava.gov/Development).
- For questions concerning a specific case, call the Department of P&Z at **703.746.4666**.
- For general questions about zoning, call the Zoning Division at **703.746.4333** or the Permit Center desk at **703.746.3856**.

### Small Area Plans



Plans identified with red boundaries signify overlay plans. Overlay plans are supplemental plans and amendments to existing Small Area Plans. Properties located within the boundaries are subject to the requirements and regulations per the overlay plan. If the overlay plan is silent to or does not address a specific issue or topic, the underlying Small Area Plan applies.

# DEVELOPMENT REVIEW TIMELINE

## PHASE 1: CONCEPT PLAN REVIEW

The Concept Plan review is an informal process designed to identify major issues before investment in detailed engineering. There is no fee for the Concept Plan process.

### Concept Stage 1 and Introductory Meetings

Initially, a property owner provides staff a rough outline and sketches of the proposal. Staff provides input relating to the project's consistency with City plans, the application types necessary for approval, and what issues need to be addressed in order to move the project through review.

The applicant provides basic information on the proposed project—the site plan, development program, building footprint, parking, etc. An assigned project planner schedules the Concept Plan for an interdepartmental review (IDR) consisting of City staff and other public agencies. Initial comments are sent to the applicant.



### Concept Stage 2

The Concept 1 process is repeated in Stage 2, though with more detailed information on issues such as traffic, stormwater management, and architectural design. The project is most often introduced to the community and the City's design committees at Concept 2. The applicant is expected to schedule meetings with nearby civic associations and groups. The project planner also engages the community relating to issues of the proposed project.

## PHASE 2: PRELIMINARY PLAN

### REVIEW

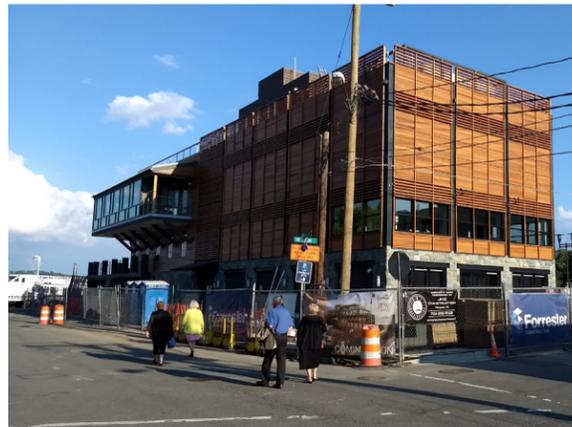
A preliminary DSP or DSUP application is generally filed once the proposal has been refined through the Concept plan review process.

### Completeness and Preliminary Plan Review

The DSP/DSUP application is reviewed by all City departments to ensure that it is "complete," and contains the necessary information outlined in the Preliminary checklist. The process typically includes a "Completeness" submission, and a subsequent "Preliminary" submission. Once the application is verified as complete, it is scheduled for a public hearing. The applicant is required to post project and contact information on their property.

### Staff Report and Public Hearing

The project planner drafts a staff report and develops conditions for City approval. The applicant can negotiate conditions with staff through the IDR process. Staff reports are posted online and available at City Hall in the Planning and Zoning office approximately two weeks prior to public hearing.



The Planning Commission hears cases at its meetings and—in the case of DSUPs—City Council hears cases at its monthly public hearings. Planning Commission and City Council hearings are generally scheduled for the same month.

## PHASE 3: FINAL SITE PLAN

If the proposed development is approved with conditions, final engineered drawings are submitted and reviewed. The Final Site Plan must be approved prior to release of building permits and the beginning of construction.

### Final Site Plan Review

With the Final Site Plan submission, City staff review more detailed engineered drawings based on the preliminary plan and a third-party reviewer, the Engineers & Surveyors Institute, is contracted to review the plan set for compliance with engineering standards. The plans are reviewed and resubmitted (typically two to three times) until site planning and building design issues have been addressed.

### Mylars & Site Plan Release

Applicants must provide estimates and post performance and maintenance bonds prior to the issuance of any permits. Mylars of the plan are submitted for final signature once all conditions of approval are satisfied.

## PHASE 4: BUILDING PERMITS & CONSTRUCTION

### Building Permits

Building permit plan sets are submitted to the Permit Center following the Final Site Plan release, and routed to City departments for review. Once comments are addressed and any necessary revised sheets provided to the City, building permits are issued and construction may commence.

### Construction & Inspections

A pre-construction meeting with the community and a construction management plan are required for approved DSPs and DSUPs per conditions of approval. Inspections are conducted by various City Departments throughout the duration of construction, and after construction is completed. These inspections ensure compliance with the approved Final Site Plan and Building Permit.

A survey of the building foundation is required prior to any vertical construction. A wall check reviews the exact location of the building footprint and verifies compliance with the approved site plan and building permits. If an inconsistency is found, the foundation may need to be corrected. Once the wall check is approved, building framing can begin.

## Certificate of Occupancy (CO)

A CO Permit permits building occupation, and inspections are conducted during a request for the permit. Any inconsistencies found during the inspection must be resolved before a CO is issued.

## PHASE 5: PROJECT CLOSEOUT

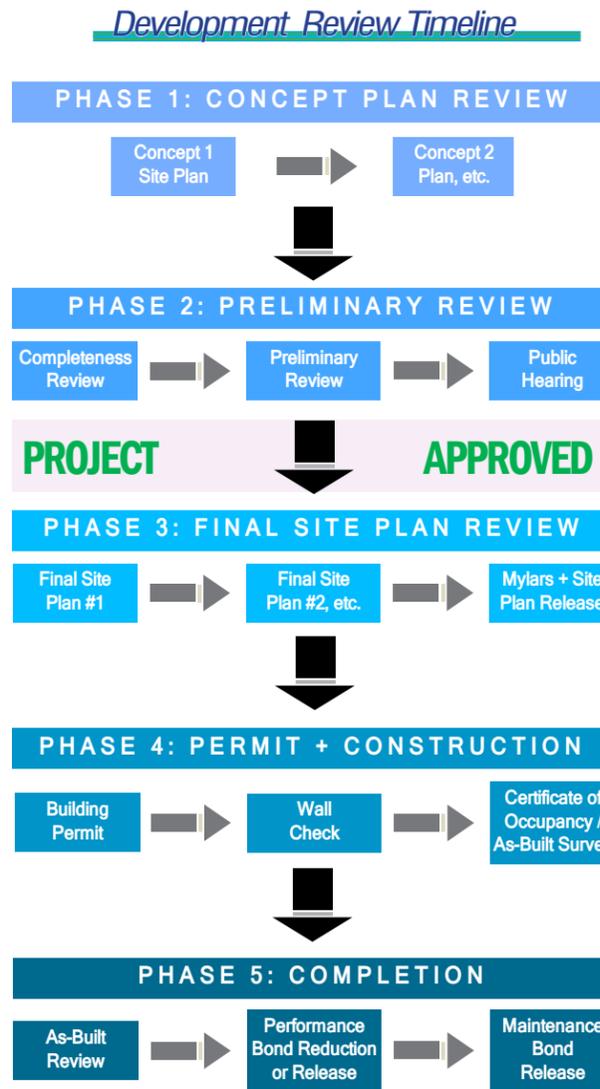
### As-Built Review

When construction is completed, applicants submit as-built plans and request a bond reduction or release. As-built plans overlay the construction survey on the released site plan. The City reviews the survey and inspects the project site to verify consistency with the approved plan. If a project is not constructed as specified, the City can pull the bond and use the funds to complete the project. The City reduces or releases the performance bond for projects constructed satisfactorily.



### Bond Reduction/Release

About two years after project completion, the applicant can request reduction or release of the maintenance bond. The maintenance bond is posted to ensure the landscaping materials remain healthy and mature appropriately. The bond is reduced or released after the City has inspected the landscaping, and the property owner has addressed staff comments. The project is officially closed when all bonds are released.



## ADDITIONAL INFORMATION

### MODIFICATIONS

Any requests for development modifications are subject to the original DSP or DSUP conditions of approval. Changes to the site or building may require amendments to the site plan. **Minor Amendments** may be administratively approved, while **Major Amendments** require a public hearing process. The Director of P&Z determines which amendment is required for the proposed changes.

### DEVELOPMENT CHECKLISTS

Checklists for Concept Plans, DSPs, DSUPs and Final Site Plans can be found at [alexandriava.gov/7524](http://alexandriava.gov/7524).

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