

MINUTES
City of Alexandria, Virginia
AD HOC OPEN SPACE STEERING COMMITTEE
Community Meeting
Leonard Chick Armstrong Recreation Center
Tuesday, January 31, 2023
7 p.m.

Committee Members

Present:

David Brown, Planning Commission

Kaitlyn Blume, Member-at-large –

Martha Harris,-Historic Alexandria Resources Commission Member

Barbara Marvin, Park and Recreation Commission Member

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

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

Denise Tennant, Beautification Commission Member and Committee Co-Chair

Excused

Mike Olex, Environmental Policy Commission Member

Absent (Unexcused)

Gutierrez, Member-at-large

Vacancies

One at-large member from the business community

One at-large member

City Staff

Jose Ayala, Principal Planner, Park Planning Division, Recreation, Parks and Cultural Affairs (RPCA), (participating electronically)

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

Judy Lo, Principal Planner, Capital Development Team, Park Planning Division, RPCA

Ana Vicinanza, Urban Planner Iii, Park Planning, RPCA

Bethany Znidersic, Division Chief, RPCA

Guests – none.

Called to order

Denise Tennant called the meeting to order at 7:05 p.m.

Public Comments on Non-Agenda Items – None

Administrative

a. APPROVAL OF DECEMBER 12, 2022, MEETING MINUTES

- **Motion:** Brown moved and Moser seconded that the minutes be approved. Approved by unanimous voice vote.

NEW STAFF INTRODUCTIONS: - Ana Vicinanza, Urban Planner III, RPCA

- Vicinanza reported that Jose Ayala, the new Principal Planner for RPCA, had joined the staff team supporting the Ad Hoc Open Space Committee. Judy Lo is now principal planner for the Capital Development Team in RPCA's Park Planning Division.
- Ayala participated in the meeting electronically because he was out of the country.

Committee Task Updates:

OPEN SPACE COMMITTEE PROCESS: SCHEDULE AND NEXT STEPS: Ana Vicinanza, Urban Planner III

- **January 2023** - Task 3 - Presentation and discussion
- **February 2023** - Task 3 - Discussion and Committee adoption
- **March 2023** - Tasks 1,2 & 3 - Committee work session and review of all three draft tasks and supporting documents
- **April 2023** - Tasks 1, 2 & 3 - Committee approval of all three tasks and supporting documents

Staff will then finalize the proposed Open Space Policy Plan amendments based on all these inputs and present them to Park and Recreation Commission, Planning Commission for approval and City Council for approval as an amendment to the City's Open Space Policy Plan.

PUBLIC OPEN SPACE ZONE TEXT AMENDMENT- Ana Vicinanza, Urban Planner III
Background –

- **In December 2021 (Task 1)** - Staff presented for Committee review proposed language to amend the City's Open Space Policy Zone Text language.
- **Goal** –To reduce the types of actions taken in existing public open spaces that require City staff to apply for an Special Use Permit (SUP) if those actions are consistent with an open space's current uses.
 - Examples - adding backstops, score boards, fencing, flagpoles, safety netting.

Next Steps (revised Zone Text Amendment schedule)

- **February – March 2023** - Staff updates City Manager and City Attorney on proposed zone text amendment language
 - **Public Engagement – Proposed Text amendment (in alphabetical order)**
 - Alexandria City Public Schools
 - Archaeology Commission

- Beautification Committee
- Commission on the Arts
- Historic Alexandria Resources Commission
- Park and Recreation Commission
- Planning Commission
- Waterfront Commission
- **March 2023**
 - Staff briefs Steering Committee on feedback during public engagement
 - Staff incorporates into the proposed Open Space Zone Text Amendment feedback from public engagement and the Steering Committee.
- **April 2023**
 - *Staff files text amendment application*
- **May/June 2023**
 - *Proposed text amendment submitted to Planning Commission and City Council for hearings and approval.*

Discussion Items and Actions

ELECTRONIC MEETING POLICY: Ana Vicinanzo, Urban Planner III

Staff reported that the state law governing electronic meetings held by Commissions and Committees has been updated and the City Attorney has advised all City Commissions and Committees to update their individual policies to keep them consistent with State policy. The updated State law now gives each Commission and Committee the option of holding up to 25 percent of its meetings as fully virtual meetings. Virtual meetings cannot, however, be held in consecutive months. Meetings still must be noticed at least three business days in advance.

- **Motion** Smith moved and Blume seconded that the Committee’s Electronic Participation Policy be amended as required. Motion passed by unanimous voice vote.

OPEN SPACE HISTORICAL BUDGET: Judy Lo, Principal Planner

- **On-line reference - PPTs 8 & 9 of full PPT presentation at:**
<https://www.alexandriava.gov/sites/default/files/2023-02/Open%20Space%20Steering%20Committee%20Meeting%20-%20201.31.2023.pdf>

Background:

- At the December 12, 2022 Ad Hoc Committee meeting, staff reviewed the Open Space Fund budget included in the FY 2023-FY 2032 Approved Capital Improvement Program Budget (CIP) – the current source for funding the Open Space Fund budget.
 - **December Committee member question:** To compare alternative funding sources, a member asked staff how much revenue was generated annually for the Open

Space Fund when its budget was funded by a dedicated fixed percentage of real estate tax revenues.

Open Space Trust Fund – Revenue generated FY2004-2014

- **Staff Follow-Up:** Staff reviewed all City Open Space Trust Fund Budgets for FY2004-FY2014, when the real estate tax revenue set-aside was in effect, and the timeline for statutory changes as the set-aside evolved.
- **Real estate set-aside statutory timeline (PPT 8)**
 - April 2003 – Ordinance passed establishing the Open Space Fund account to receive \$.01/\$100 of assessed real estate value of all real estate subject to tax (a set-aside)
 - June 2007 – Ordinance updated – changed to 1% of total real estate taxes collected.
 - April 2009 – OS Fund set-aside from real estate tax reduced to cover only debt service.
 - June 2013 – OS Fund Set-aside from real estate tax eliminated. Future OS Fund funding sources to be either general obligation bonds or cash capital.
- **Open Space Annual Budgets** – including funding trends
 - FY2004-FY2014 from the set-aside and from General Obligation Funds and Cash Capital.
 - FY2014 – 2023 funding (after the real estate tax set aside was ended) is also included.

Staff: Open Space goals: When Council passed the set-aside statute the City’s goal was to provide funding to protect 100 acres of Open Space, which has been achieved. City’s current Open Space goal is to create a strategy going forward for achieving and maintaining Open Space over the next couple decades.]

Committee Discussion & Questions (Historical budget)

- **Current Open Space Fund balance?** A: \$1.3 million.
- **Open Space Fund’s current annual funding?** A: Changes annually in the CIP. FY2023’s CIP budget is \$400,000.
- **Open Space Fund’s projected annual CIP funding going forward?** A: \$400,000 is planned in the FY2023-2032 CIP budget, subject to changes as needed when the CIP budget is approved each year.
- **Is Open Space Fund used for acquisition and maintenance?** A: No. Only for open space acquisition costs. Maintenance and staffing are separately funded categories.
- **Is funding for park improvements available from other budget areas?** A: Yes. Annual operating budget is separate.

DRAFT TASK 2: ACQUISITION CRITERIA TRIGGER: Ana Vicinanzo, Urban Planner III

- ***On-line Reference: PPTs 10, 11 & 12 of full PPT presentation at: <https://www.alexandriava.gov/sites/default/files/2023-02/Open%20Space%20Steering%20Committee%20Meeting%20-%201.31.2023.pdf>***

New Task 2 (Pursuing new publicly accessible open space) issue: City was asked in recent months to review several properties as Open Space candidates. In response, staff has developed proposed language to provide criteria that triggers a staff review of potential Open Space sites.

The proposed Acquisition Criteria Trigger language was presented for Committee review:

- **Step 1** - If the site is identified within an existing approved park master plan or a City plan (Small Area Plan, pedestrian/bike plans, etc.), the land can be reviewed for potential acquisition.
- **Step 2:** Land is not identified in a plan, but meets at least one of the criteria listed below:
 - The property is associated with existing parks:
 - The site shares its perimeter with an existing public space and is essential to the expansion of that public space.
 - The site is an infill property of an existing park, located on the corner of a park or would serve to normalize a park boundary or shape.
 - The site will allow the creation of new trail connections to improve pedestrian and bicycle access to the existing park or other nearby City facilities -like schools.

OR

- The property would result in the creation of a new park:
- The site could be used to create a new park and offers future potential expansion opportunities that would result in a park of at least 0.25 acres.
- The site is a unique (generational) opportunity, which if not acquired at the time of availability, would likely redevelop, and the opportunity would be lost for a generation or more.
- The site is located in an area of the City with a walkability gap (there are no publicly accessible open spaces within a 10-minute walk) or serves as an inherent community gathering place.
- The site has an existing perpetual conservation easement on it, serving as the first step towards making the site permanently open space.

Committee discussion/questions

- **Re Step 2 Bullet 1** –Change “essential” to “facilitates” for “site shares its perimeter with an existing public space and is essential to the expansion of that public space.
- **Re Step 2 Bullet 2/ enhance access** - Suggested adding for Re step 2, add “enhance access to an existing park”
- **Re: Step 2 Bullet 9/ existing perpetual conservation easement** – “The site has an existing perpetual conservation easement on it, serving as the first step towards making the site permanently open space.”
 - **Comment/Monticello Park** Appreciation that criteria would cover the situation presented during public comments at the Committee’s December 2022 meeting by David Meyer - the existing conservation easement on private property adjacent to Monticello Park would be at risk for redevelopment if neighbors wishing to preserve the easement could not find funding to buy that part of the property when the property is sold.

DRAFT TASK 3 - OPEN SPACE IN NEW DEVELOPMENT

- **PRESENTATION AND DISCUSSION: Ana Vicinanza, Urban Planner III**
- **On-line Reference: PPTs 14, 15 and 16 of full meeting PPT presentation at:**
<https://www.alexandriava.gov/sites/default/files/2023-02/Open%20Space%20Steering%20Committee%20Meeting%20-%201.31.2023.pdf>

Background: Committee’s Task 3 is to provide guidance for new development’s contribution to publicly accessible open space where it is not already guided by the Small Area Plan)

Proposed Task 3 language for Committee feedback:

When an applicant has been unable to meet its open space requirement, and an alternative is not already guided by the Small Area Plan, the following options are to be used to satisfy the requirement: (PPT 14)

- **Option 1:** Land is dedicated as publicly accessible open space by deeding land to the City or a public open space space easement is placed on it (PPT 15)
- **Option 2** — Open space is purchased off-site and either deeded to the City or a public open space easement is placed on it (PPT 15)

Staff emphasized that City prefers a land donation (Alternatives 1 or 2) if a developer applying for a Development Special Use Permit (applicant) can’t meet the City’s redevelopment Open Space requirement on-site.

- **Alternative 1 (formerly proposed Option 3)** – Monetary or in-kind contribution for park improvements and maintenance. (Details: PPT 16)

- **Alternative 2 (formerly proposed Option 4)** – When the above options cannot be satisfied, a development provides a monetary contribution to the Open Space Fund. (Details: PPT 16)

Staff's Proposed Recommendations:

On-line reference: PPTs 17-18

- **Development Contribution Task Force**–
 - **Recommendation:** City should establish a Task Force to review the City's contribution policies and needs directly impact development.
 - **Goal** - Create a comprehensive development contribution policy for new development. Evaluate other departments' contribution requirements and establish an overall policy that balances the City's needs.
 - **Advantage** – Would create an orderly centralized reference point that department staff can consult when considering additional requirements for a development, e. g. adding new open space requirements.
- **Open Space Policy – Development contributions**

Note: This would be a major policy change and is outside the Steering Committee's scope. Committee could, however, recommend it be considered.

 - **Recommendation:** Proposal is based on other Virginia localities' policies for mitigating development's overall impact on their overall open space infrastructure.
 - Explore developing a policy to mitigate the impacts of development on existing Citywide open space by requiring developers to provide funds to the Open Space Fund that would be used
 - Use contributions for open space acquisition, maintenance, and improvements to the open space system.
 - Acquisitions, maintenance, and improvements should be guided by Park Improvement Plans, Public Open Space Assessments (Walkability, Condition, Design, and Equity Assessments), and/or meet amenity needs within the City (amenities include but are not limited to, playgrounds, sports courts, athletic fields, dog parks, and fitness equipment).
 - Policy should distinguish between residential and non-residential development.
- **Building conversions from office/commercial to residential**
 - **Recommendation:** City should review building conversions and create a policy that reflects new development needs
 - **Background:** Open space needs of residential development are greater than for other uses – but most such conversions are carried out administratively without a review that sets open space needs for the development.

Committee discussion/questions

- ***Donating publicly accessible open space*** - Support for language that emphasizes the City prefers that the applicant donate Publicly Accessible Open Space land (rather than money) to meet the City's open space requirements for developments;
- ***Monetary contribution to Open Space Fund*** - Support for the City keeping the option that a developer can choose to make a monetary contribution to the Open Space Fund instead of making an on-site or off-site donation of publicly accessible open space land
 - Attach conditions that reduce this option's potential appeal for an applicant.
- ***Monetary contributions to OS Fund*** - Support for the City's proposal that when an applicant chooses to make a monetary contribution to the Open Space Fund as an alternative for meeting the City's Open Space requirement, the value of the monetary donation would be set by the City's Real Estate Office – based on that office's calculating the projected value of the development site's land between 2030-2045, using the development site's square footage and the site's future projected value.
 - **Note:** 2030 – 2045 is the time when the City projects it will no longer be able to meet its goal of having 7.3 acres per 1,000 residents.
- ***Are there limits to what types of development this policy covers?*** A: Office to residential conversions are an example of a category that falls outside the City's approval process requiring open space contributions.
- ***Re: Staff recommendation that City create an inter-departmental Development Contribution Task Force*** – Interest in the idea of having a central reference point for staff to track requirements on new developments when additional requirements are being considered, e.g. related to Open Space.
- ***Re: Staff recommendation to create a policy that would in some manner require each development to make a contribution to the Open Space Fund that would help mitigate new development's impact on the Citywide open space infrastructure.***
 - Committee members had questions about this idea.
 - How many additional expenses can be absorbed to mitigate development's Citywide impacts?
 - Should Citywide impacts be paid for by general tax revenues?
 - Should the real estate tax set-aside be restored to provide additional funds – instead of imposing an additional fee on developments?
 - Could Open Space Funds also cover recommended park improvements?
 - Suggested the proposed Task Force should consider how to generate funds to cover the \$72.5 million gap between available resources and the City's unfunded recommended improvements in City-owned parks.
- ***Building conversions from office/commercial to residential/***

Proposed Recommendation - City should review building conversions and create a policy that reflects new development needs.

- Comments supported for the goal, recognizing this is both a zoning and an open space issue.

Next meeting:

February 28, 2023 at Mount Vernon Recreation Center, 7 p.m.

Adjournment:

At 8:25 p.m. Brown moved and Smith seconded the meeting adjourn. Approved by unanimous voice vote.