



Alexandria West Community Planning

Meeting 9 Questions and Answers – Online

Thursday, April 25, 2024

Please Note: All meeting materials, including the webinar video recording, interpreted recordings, and Q&A, are available on the project website at alexandriava.gov/AlexandriaWest

All questions in Q+A were answered live.

Urban Design/Land Use

- 1. Good evening! In responses to some comments, staff stated that the amount of height/density allowed for housing matches the amount of development projected. Why not make it legal for landowners to build more housing in case the amount of growth over the next few decades exceeds projections?**

Live answered by Jeff Farnier. Thank you for the question. Referring to focus area graphic, as we are thinking about the need for long-term planning and housing production, how did we factor it with this Plan? Staff looked at the growth forecast but also historic trends doing a sensitivity analysis of what happens if we get more than historically. We took into account all of those elements into account. We believe the Focus Area accommodates flexibility if more happens or a site isn't anticipated. We also think the Focus Area accommodates and is flexible to potential changes or shifts within the timeframe of the Plan. We're glad to follow up on that but we did a lot of early economic analysis on economic trends, potential impacts, and performed a market analysis as well.

- 2. Not a question, but thank you so much for addressing my comment about the heights map and changing the color scheme to make it easier to compare heights in different locations!**

Live answered by Richard Lawrence. Thank you for the feedback.

- 3. Are there any planned BRT stops that have height limits lower than 150 feet surrounding the stop? If so, what are those height limits?**

Live answered by Richard Lawrence. At Sanger Avenue building heights for the proposed transit station are between 45 and 60 feet, at Rayburn Avenue there are building heights that range from 100 to 150 feet, at Mark Center it is between 100 and 150 feet, at Southern Towers it is between 85 and 100 feet, at Fillmore Avenue it is between 60 and 150, at W Braddock Road it is between 60 and 100 feet, and 100 feet at King Street and N Bearegard Street.

- 4. Is the newly proposed 60 feet height within Area 2 as high as the building can go or will there be a range of height for these sites? If yes, what would the range be for these different sites within Area 2? Again, if yes, what factors will contribute to the buildings height increase? The same question with FAR - would there be a range with the 2.0 FAR? If yes, what would the range for FAR be? Can you also please answer these set of questions for the newly proposed 85 feet height at the community college and near the college and Bearegard Street?**

Live answered by Jeff Farner. The short answer is yes, with one caveat. Properties are eligible to request bonus density and/or height for the provision of affordable housing, per the zoning ordinance (Section 7-700). If they elect not to do that, the maximum height would be 60 feet. Generally, within individual buildings and particularly in larger sites you have different building types. For example, townhouses are generally 45 feet and multi-unit buildings are taller and would probably use the maximum height. In terms of FAR, in Area 2 the FAR is 2.0 and would be subject to that with the same caveat that they could request additional density (i.e. FAR) for the provision of affordable housing. The same would apply for the community college related to maximum height unless they request additional density and/or height for the provision of affordable housing.

5. If residents have concerns about the direction of their neighborhoods within Area 2 after reading the updated draft, what next steps or actions can be taken?

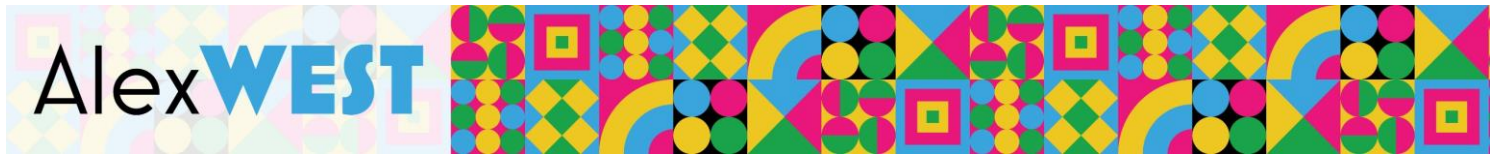
Live answered by Jeff Farner. In terms of concerns, one of the things I would suggest is if there are individual properties, areas, or communities that want to talk to us, we are available to talk with you particularly before the draft Plan comes out in June. Please reach out to Christian Brandt, Urban Planner, 703.746.3859, Christian.Brandt@alexandriava.gov. This is very much a working draft and we're sharing information as part of this process and happy to talk more.

6. If residents have a preference for attractive buildings that are timeless and remain attractive, does that mean a developer can increase the height and/or width of the building to accommodate the residents' preference for attractive timeless buildings?

Live answered by Jeff Farner. The Design Standards that we are discussing will not necessarily change the width or dimensions of buildings but are contemplating the overall design of the streets, the parks, the buildings, and the exterior skin of the buildings. All of those need to work together in the community. We've heard from many of you about the importance of that so the design standards will not require that buildings get deeper or higher. It is just going to have standards for individual buildings when projects come in during the development review process.

7. I am astounded to see development being flagged for our school sites. City-wide, this idea has been dismissed when raised by Council, and indeed, there are legal restrictions against it. And why, even if the development is more educational facilities, why a 60' height right next to SF homes?

Live answered by Richard Lawrence. As Jeff mentioned in the presentation, the update to increase heights at those locations is to bring sites into compliance with the existing Zoning Ordinance allowance for school sites. It's a matter of compliance, it is not changing the land use or suggesting a change in the land use. Should sites come in for future expansion or development within ACPS's redevelopment timeline, the Plan will already be set up for ACPS to proceed with school updates without requesting a modification of the Plan. It's really an update to current City policy for those sites and when they redevelop, they will still need to go through the development review process.



Additional response by Jeff Farner. This is an important question and clarification: this is just for public schools. This is not incentivizing development as Richard just said. This is acknowledging the Zoning Ordinance today permits up to 60 feet for public schools. There is no plan, no intention, it's just bringing those sites into compliance with existing zoning.

8. Could you please clarify what you mean by district scale, neighborhood scale, and public realm?

Live answered by Jeff Farner. In general, we talked a lot about character of streets, character of spaces, and character of connections. As Ryan talked about overall network and circulation, there will be district scale streets in the community like N Beaugard St and Seminary Rd. How streets are handled, how the sidewalks are handled, and how we address safety. We heard from many of you about the importance of tree canopy. There is also a landscape buffer which does a couple things: it helps address the environmental goals we talked about and it also provides a buffer for pedestrians. If you think about both safety and walkability, you feel more comfortable walking there and you are also safer because you have a barrier.

Neighborhood scale is just that. The streets and sidewalks are generally more intimate, narrower, and more appropriately scaled to traditional neighborhoods. One of the things from a public realm standpoint is, it really is the sidewalk, the bike facilities, and where people walk and where people experience their neighborhoods the most. It's being very intentional about things like street trees, where the buildings are placed, how does that building engage with sidewalk, making it feel safe and providing facilities for all the users pedestrians, cyclists, and people riding in their car. It identifies ways and strategies that balance all those users. We think there are ways to do that while thinking about elements at different scales as it relates to design. It's far more than the buildings themselves, it's how those components contribute to this community and not detract.

9. Can you show height or density maps when answering questions about those topics?

Answered by Christian Brandt. Yes, I will make sure that we do. Apologies!

10. If additional height for affordable housing is used on a 60 feet height building, how can the building go? Is a 60 feet height building a 5 story or 6 story building? And what will the FAR be if bonus density is used? The same question for the 85 feet height buildings? And same question for FAR with 85 feet height?

Live answered by Jeff Farner. I'll try and talk generally. The question I think for 60' is if they use bonus density, how high will it go? Those buildings will be subject to a Special Use Permit (SUP). It has to be approved by Planning Commission and City Council and involves the community as part of that process. I would submit that the likely maximum height will be 85 feet. That is tied to economics and some of the building types we discussed in the earlier. That is only contingent on property owners requesting bonus density and height.

For the community college, I suspect even with bonus height they won't go above 85 feet. They could request bonus height but the market and underlying economics probably won't allow that. One of the FAQs I was thinking about was how we summarize some of these underlying economics. Steel and concrete buildings, which are higher, are generally things we won't see in



this Plan area in the short- to mid-term. FAR might be requested but probably not height. The last part of the question is how many levels is a 60 foot building. Possibly 6 levels, but probably 5 levels.

Transportation

- 11. Proposed bicycle network: 1. Could you add a connection from Fillmore (Sharrows?) via Bisdorf to Northern Virginia Community College? 2. Could you add a bike path from Chambliss to John Adams? There is an existing path, but it is not currently rideable. 3. Thanks for including a reference to the planned bike/pedestrian connection from the Landmark site. Would it be possible to extend the proposed trail that the bridge would connect to north across Holmes Run to the Holmes Run Trail?**

Live answered and additional response **in bold** by Ryan Knight. 1) On Fillmore, as the bike and ped network illustrates there is planned on-road facilities which can be more than sharrows today. So whether that means bike lanes, or anything similar, that is what the Plan includes now. **Bisdorf Drive is currently a private street. We are limited in what we are able to designate in a Small Area Plan. However, as the adjacent parcel develops, we will keep in mind the bike connectivity.** 2) **In regards to the connection from N. Chambliss Street (near Grisby Street) to Johns Adam Elementary via the path adjacent to the tennis court and the baseball fields, we can consider improving the path into a trail.** 3) In terms of the connection to the Holmes Run trail connection, we could consider it, however, in regard to the access from the Landmark site we have to go over the interstate which would include coordination from State and Federal agencies. **After further consultation with the City's Transportation team, a connection does make sense and we are not precluding a connection in the plan.**

- 12. Is there still time to contribute ideas for prioritization of projects in the mobility section?**

Live answered by Ryan Knight. Thank you for the questions. The projects that's listed in the mobility section are in various stages. You have some projects that are in the planning phase and there are others that are in stages of the project which we encourage people to engage with us. Some projects are in the design stage, however, it's more informative at that point, and, then there are projects that are in construction as we speak right now that are again just more informative engagement like planned maintenance of traffic.

Projects that are within the early stages which are projects like Sanger Avenue improvements, Seminary Road improvements, and Safe Routes to School improvements are where we would encourage engagement on these efforts. Please be on the lookout for the advancement of those projects and if you have any interest in these projects visit our webpage and there is contact information for the project manager. Reach out to the project manager with any questions, concerns, or feedback.

Green Building/Affordable Housing/Land Use

- 13. With the changes to the Green Building policy now in the works requiring buildings to be much more energy efficient - meaning much lower electric bills - will this make all new units much more affordable?**



Live answered by Jeff Farnar. As we are thinking about making elements and units more affordable, if there is less money going to utilities it is a savings to all residents who live in those units. As we are reviewing the Green Building Policy it is going to help with affordability. It is still to be determined in terms of scale and amount. The other thing that is important as we look at affordability in this Plan area is making transportation accessible and affordable. This is part of conversation Ryan was having, the transit facility at Southern Towers, and in addition to all elements Tamara was talking about. All elements: sustainability, transportation, land use, and housing affordability need to work together.

Additional response by Tamara Jovovic. I can also add that when we talk about preservation and retrofitting existing buildings whether it's improving the insulation or replacing windows, it can have a significant impact. The older the buildings typically the larger the utility cost and greater the burden placed on residents' housing costs.

General Process

14. When will the Frequently Asked Questions (FAQ) be available? If clarification is needed, will there be a format for residents to use?

Live answered by Richard Lawrence. Staff are currently developing an FAQ and are hoping to release one by the end of the month. Obviously, there have been a lot of questions and so we want to make sure we are understanding what they are to generate a FAQ to capture the scope of the questions. Once it is released, we will send notification or update the community that it is available and will located on the [project webpage](#).

15. When will Plan be available for review?

Live answered by Richard Lawrence. We are working towards a mid-June draft Plan release. It would include the revised Plan recommendations in addition to the entirety of the draft Plan narratives, maps, etc. for public review. The Plan release will be followed by a period of public comment. We would then review, revise the Plan, and prepare for public hearings in early Fall.