

P&Z Virtual Community Update, 9.15.2026

Questions from Meeting Attendees

#	Question	Answered Live
1	In your research on substandard lots, have you looked at the size of the homes on those lots? That is, do homes on substandard lots tend to be any smaller than homes in the same neighborhood that are on complying lots?	The size of a lot corresponds to the Floor Area Ratio (FAR), or the available square footage, which can be built on that lot. So, what we found is that those lots which are substandard do typically have smaller sizes than what could be built on a lot that is complying. In other words, the size of the house sort of scales with the size of the lot.
2	1, How will you define "surrounding lots" per "A"" in developments where you will allow development by right (not SUP).	So in defining surrounding lots, we look at the contextual block face, and 50% of the contextual block face would need to be similar size and character to be considered a by-right development. So the contextual block face is the neighbor on each side of the lot, as well as the neighbor directly in front, and then kind of catty corner. So most contextual block faces encompass about 5 lots, sometimes 6, sometimes 7, it just depends on the neighborhood and how it's developed, but it would look at, essentially, those lots which abut that property on the same street. So we're not looking at the lots behind, but those which share the same street and would be considered abutting properties.
3	2. for substandard lots that you will be recommending will be able to build "by right", how will neighbors (i.e. the public) know about the build, in case they need to inform the City about idiosyncrasies the city might not know about regarding the substandard lot?.	Development of substandard lots almost always triggers a grading plan, and the City puts notice on properties which are going through grading plan review. So, if you're walking down the street, you should see that. So there's some notice that development is happening. While you may inform the city of idiosyncrasies, staff typically does a grading plan review, there's building plan review, zoning review, there's many levels of review for any home that gets built. Staff should hopefully discover some of these idiosyncrasies that you refer to, but there will be some form of notice when it comes to the grading plan. And it is common for us to get questions based off those notices/placards. And as Tony said, staff obviously brings a lot of technical skill to these reviews, but there can be things that are funny about a neighborhood that are helpful to know. And that's one of the reasons for the notices/placards. And we do get calls about development cases. Sometimes it's people who are looking for more information, they're curious about what's proposed. Or they might know something about how the back corner of a property tends to flood whenever it rains because something weird happened with the storm in that 10 years ago and never got fixed. And so those are the kinds of things that the notices/placards and the neighborhood members can help service.

4	What is the connection between historic preservation and the height/size of new buildings?	So, the zoning ordinance empowers the BAR with what they can review, and there are standards which the BAR is empowered to look at, and one of those is the overall architectural design, form, style, and structure, including, but not limited to, the height, mass, and scale of buildings or structures. So it is written into the zoning ordinance that the BAR can review and does review the bulk characteristics of not only historic structures, which are undergoing a renovation or some type of improvement, but also new structures, which are being built within the historic district to ensure compatibility with the historic district and the surrounding properties. And that is a pretty typical standard that's used even at the national scale to understand how <u>nearby development can impact an important cultural resource</u>.
5	New administrative site plans - does the legislation allow no public outreach for any of these projects? Staff recommendation for a sign on the site is a ridiculously low level of outreach for a project that wil affect each neighborhood. What is your reasoning for so little announcement of project review?	So the state legislation from the Virginia General Assembly is silent on the matter of outreach, and so we think it is appropriate to have additional outreach requirements, or additional outreach procedures that, in this case, the City would conduct. And we're looking at the administrative site plan process as a good example to follow because the administrative special use permits already exist. We would follow that process or something similar to it as part of the administrative site plan outreach. The reasoning for the staff recommendation is to create a noticing requirement, just like we do with grading plans. That's not a state-level requirement to create that notice for grading plans, but we do it because we know it's important to make people aware. And so we're looking the pathways that would be timely and effective for these as well. The administrative site plan process rolled out across most of the state last year, and this year it's coming to Alexandria, like I said, because of the state legislative changes. And because of the timelines are involved, that's why we want to make sure that whatever notice we do, it can get out to folks who would find it. So that's really guiding our recommendations.

6	Tony - regarding BAR review - good idea to require BAR concept review during staff review - but the proposed pathway (presented to the public on 9/10 and made available online on 9/11) show a very easy path for developers to appeal to council should there be any BAR comments that require they follow OHAD zoning ordinances - why do you allow this outlet rather than requiring preservation of the scale, massing and materials of buildings within historic districts?	So, I'll first start off by saying it's important to remember that the concept review only pertains to projects that are going through the DSUP process. And the DSUP process allows for developers to ask for additional development rights through the special use permit process, where they're going to City Council to ask for something that is above what the zoning ordinance allows, but still within a certain threshold or a range. So developers are still proposing buildings that comply with zoning. The Zoning ordinance allows them to ask for additional development rights, like height or scale, so it's not to say that we're not requiring preservation of scale massing and materials. Those are still required, and they still have to meet zoning ordinance regulations. City Council has mentioned that occasionally there are BAR cases for DSUP projects that are appealed after they go to the BAR. So what we're doing with this process is allowing for the appeal to take place at the City Council hearing where the DSUP project is being considered. So that can take place simultaneously, rather than the project being approved by City Council, going back to BAR, and then being appealed, and then going back to City Council, and then City Council voting on something that they've already approved when it comes to the bulk characteristics. This kind of simplifies the process, makes sure that the review is staying together. You know, rather than breaking it up, City Council has said we would rather these appeals take place sooner in the process rather than later. And I think what staff is proposing achieves that aim. And I don't think the BAR is losing any power here, the citizens aren't losing any power, you can still make an appeal to City Council based on a dislike of bulk characteristics. It just won't happen after the DSUP approval, it'll happen during DSUP approval. So you can appeal that BAR approval at the same time it's going to City Council for DSUP approval.
---	--	--

7	what if it has no contextual block face? will it no longer qualify since it must have a blockface. what will the methodology used to determine eligibility? will you stick to strict apples to apples IE lot built with detached v lot built w detached. or will you use lots detached to lots developed with TH's or semi detached?	So, I can answer the second part of the question first. What we're looking at are lots which are in the same zone, and we're looking at the lot size. We're not looking at the development that's on the particular lot, what we're looking at is the size of the lot. The size, the width, and the lot frontage. So if that is, similar or the same as a neighboring property within the contextual block face, the substandard lot development can happen by right. When it comes to the block face, I'm not sure there are lots that don't have a contextual block face. Lots almost always abut another lot, or there are streets that, when you look at a map, you remove those streets, scrunch all the lots together, and that's how you get your contextual block face. So, there will always be a block face there. One thing to keep in mind is that we're looking at lots which are in the same zone, and the contextual block face, which is the neighbors that are abutting. If the lot, say, to the right isn't in the same zone, we don't consider that part of the contextual block face, but there are probably going to be some cases where staff will have some questions, we'll have to work through some issues, and in those cases, staff might recommend that the case just goes to City Council for public hearing, because we don't have a clear path forward. The zoning ordinance will be pretty prescriptive on what we're looking for if it can't meet those criteria. If the lot can't meet those criteria for development, then it has to go to City Council for review. So, that might be the case in those situations.
8	Placard do not inform the public - you have to walk by the site to see this - so many in the neighborhood miss this (and many have been posted AFTER these go to the PC). Why not advertise in the Times or ALXNow or the ALXBrief - that would be the responsible solution.	Insofar as this may be related to the administrative site plan and YIGBY project, I just wanted to say that we are already looking at the administrative special use permit noticing requirements and provisions that are in our zoning ordinance. Off the top of my head, I seem to recall that they do have a newspaper noticing requirement. We appreciate the comments. We'll take a look at that and see whether that's something that can be applied in the case of administrative site plans, too. You know, one thing that I've learned through the years is that a placard works far better than a newspaper advertisement. Placards on a property typically get the attention of the neighboring homeowners, which is the most important property owner to inform. And those are the ones that we want to hear from. You might get a couple of comments from a newspaper ad, but the most comments come from those placards which are posted on the property.

9	compatibility has been thrown around a lot here. please clarify your compatibility definition that will consistently be used so it's not an arbitrary use of the word compatibility. this is a pain point for many in the community at large. development pattern more so style of the home	Whether it's a buy-right lot or it's a substandard lot, most property owners today are developing the lot out to almost its maximum FAR, its maximum square footage. I don't think there's much we can do about that unless City Council downzones most of these properties, or the entire city. You know, it is a free market economy. If a property owner wants to develop their property to the max FAR available to them, then that is available to them. It's a lot to do with economics. You have to make a project pencil out, and if someone's building a home, or a developer is building a home, they need to ensure that the costs that it costs to build are covered, and often that means maxing out the square feet. And I think the other question about compatibility of the lots, that'll be defined in the ordinance. That language will be available before the hearing.
10	Can you speak to the progress of Landmark Overlook and/or. Landmark "shopping center"	So on the south side of Duke Street, the Landmark Overlook project, the townhouses are underway there, so you should be able to see those under construction. I know the site work had started some time ago. And then on the north side of Duke Street, for what was previously the Landmark Shopping Center, now the INOVA site. Good things to report on the hospital. Several months ago, they celebrated their topping out, meaning that they had reached the maximum height of the development, and of course, they'll continue finishing the building from there. There was also a ground-breaking ceremony for one of the multi-family buildings that was celebrated a couple months ago, and there's also progress being made on the townhouse blocks that are part of that development.
11	a lot with no street frontage may have no abutting lots. how is this defined when under your definition it won't work. this is for an super lot	A lot without frontage would still require a special use permit. A lot without frontage would still be required to go to City Council for approval.

12	Can you comment on the fact that Robinson Terminal North has lost its funding? The continuation of the Mount Vernon Trail - that is interrupted by this block -needs to have at least a temporary path, could you please work with the developer to make this happen?	One of the things that sort of underpins this is usually the things that the community wants to see as envisioned in a Small Area Plan, come with the pairing of private investment and redevelopment. Those two things often go hand in hand. We have visions for new restaurants, new housing opportunities, new parks, and so often those are paired with investment. That's generally how those things get done. I'll follow up on the mechanics of whether that phrasing is correct, that they lost their funding. And I know that that continuation along the waterfront trail is important, that that was something that occurred early if the project went to development. While the project remains undeveloped, I think that's a different situation, because at a minimum, there is a technical challenge that the grade doesn't match, that the Alex Renew Plaza and the end of Oronoco don't line up, and so at a minimum, there will be some site work completed to make that work. But obviously, we can follow up with the landowner.
----	--	---