



YIMBYs of NoVA Feedback on Duke Street Land Use Plan Draft Recommendations

As the Alexandria leads for YIMBYs of Northern Virginia, we applaud the hard work and thoughtful planning that went into the Duke Street Land Use Plan Draft Recommendations. The recommendations envision a future Duke Street that is more affordable, safer, and more livable for all residents, and align planned land use with the coming transitway to make Duke Street a great place to live and move around. We are broadly very excited about the Draft Recommendations and think staff have done great work. There are a few changes we would like to see to make the Plan even better.

- **Increase height limits in the 35' Residential Low areas to 50'.** While these neighborhoods will not have large-scale redevelopment, increasing heights will give property owners the option for small, incremental development to add more homes to the plan area, like townhouses and stacked duplexes. There is precedent for small developments with a row of 45' townhouses replacing single-family homes on larger lots; two recent examples are 6336 Stevenson Ave and 5216 Seminary Rd. Developments like these are a great way to add more homes to Alexandria, and we shouldn't limit them with overly restrictive height limits. A 50' height limit would also unlock the opportunity to use bonus height under Section 7-700 to add committed affordable homes to the plan area's most expensive neighborhoods. As Duke Street becomes a major transit corridor for Alexandria, it doesn't make sense to restrict large portions of the plan area from even incremental change.

It is also inequitable for low density areas to be the only ones seen as unchangeable in Small Area Plans, instead requiring rare and arduous citywide policymaking efforts like Zoning for Housing to make even small changes to some of Alexandria's wealthiest neighborhoods.

- **Allow taller heights throughout the Mason and Foxchase sites (Overlook and Myers districts).** These neighborhoods are important sources of market-affordable homes, and if the property owners choose to redevelop them, we can't afford to artificially limit the new homes that are built there. Allowing uniform heights throughout the sites would allow the property owners to take full advantage of the plan's incentives for committed affordable homes, and would ensure that those sites continue to be a source of affordable homes in the plan area. We should not artificially limit how much housing we build - especially affordable housing - for the sake of "neighborhood character".
- **Ensure that the Small Business areas retain flexibility to build homes.** We appreciate the flexibility of the Business/Commercial Zones around Wheeler Ave. and Colvin Street. While these areas aren't likely to redevelop as quickly as the designated



Opportunity Zones, we also shouldn't foreclose changes there - especially in the areas around Colvin Street that will be adjacent to future BRT stops.

- Plan for safe multimodal access on retail streets. Major roads should plan for safe access by multiple modes for road users of all ages and abilities, including the bikes and scooters that are increasingly popular in the city. If we are building new retail streets from scratch in places like Foxchase and Alexandria Commons, these streets should be designed with safety and access at the forefront. Including mobility lanes not only improves access for all road users and separates bikes & scooters from pedestrians and cars, it has also been shown to increase revenue for the businesses located along these streets.

We hope Alexandria will continue to welcome new homes of all types, along Duke Street and in all parts of our city, to address our regional housing crisis and make our city more economically productive, environmentally friendly, and socially connected today and for generations to come.

Phoebe Coy, Alex Goyette, Yasir Nagi, Stephanie Elms, and Peter Sutherland
YIMBYS of Northern Virginia Alexandria leads

From:

Date:

Wednesday, July 22, 2026 5:25:22 PM

Hi Christian,

I hope that your summer has been going well! This is [REDACTED] from the Quaker Hill Community Association—you joined one of our Board meetings last year.

I wanted to make a comment on the website regarding the proposed plan, but the link appears to be broken. I plan to attend the public meeting next week, but I felt it important to reach out regarding our community's specific concern in case there is not time to address it during the session.

As the President of the Association I have to ask what evaluation was made to consider converting Alexandria Commons into residential development? We as a community strongly object to this plan and would appreciate a deeper discussion with the city before it moves forward. Our concerns center on two primary issues:

1) Traffic

As it currently stands, the ability for residents of our community to access Duke Street has steadily worsened as the thoroughfare is built up and more and more traffic attempts to access I-495. In fact, there is only one official access point to Duke Street Eastbound in the 4000ft stretch of our community—a left turn in front of Bishop Ireton school (which has horrible traffic backups during the morning and evening rush hours due to school drop off). This road is accessed by residents of our HOA, the College Park residents not in our HOA, students and parents of Bishop Ireton and Douglas MacArthur Schools, and traffic attempting to access I-495 from Quaker Lane and King Street. More residential housing will mean more traffic that further exacerbates an already challenging traffic situation. If there are no plans to widen Duke Street at this choke point to 495 and to create more access points for eastbound, there should not be plans to add units at this section. I recall a plan to add bus rapid transit that will also limit eastbound access.

2) Erosion

The second concern we have is erosion due to the marine clay substrate that our community was built on. The soil erodes aggressively on downward slopes, and we've already spent over \$100,000 out of our community's funds to mitigate a small area of erosion that led to structural damage to three townhomes. If the hill behind the south side of our community is graded out to put in more residential development, as the image shows, we strongly anticipate it will exacerbate the erosion issue for that section of the community (and we are willing to submit engineering studies to the city to illustrate these concerns). Furthermore, because the majority of the land on the south side of the community is owned by the Commons, not by us, I'm not sure what measures we would be able to take to mitigate the erosion.

Please let me know how would be best to discuss these concerns further with the team. We would be more than happy to have you join another Board session.

Best,



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source.

From:

Date:

Wednesday, July 22, 2026 8:30:23 PM

Good Evening,

My name is [REDACTED] and I am on the Board of the Quaker Hill Community Association. About a year or so ago, you presented our Community with a presentation on the Duke Street Land Use Plan.

I am reaching out, not as a member of that Board, but as a homeowner and parent. I have already commended on the Engagement Hub, but the character limit there prevents effective stress on my concerns. I understand the need to re-assess the land use plan on the Duke Street corridor, but I have very serious concerns about the proposals for the area near my community.

First, it is worth noting that, the City's attempt to "Keep Duke Street Moving" do absolutely nothing but benefit the people passing through the city. I am spending up to 45 minutes each afternoon to travel the 3.5 miles to my kids school in Old Town. That is INSANE.

The one bright spot in all of this is that Alexandria Commons is walking distance from my home. I can easily get groceries, go to the dentist, the eye doctor, get some dinner, or take my kids to swim class, all without getting back into my car.

Redeveloping that shopping center and replacing it with a building upto 85-feet tall would take away the one thing that I like about living here. There is more and more housing going in, but yet, businesses that service those people are being eliminated. Along with those businesses, are employment opportunities for lots of people, especially younger people.

Buildings that height immediately behind our homes would be an eyesore. Not to mention the fact that it would block a fair amount of southern exposure which people rely on in order to power solar panels and in some cases, grow their gardens. It also has the potential to negatively impact the property value of the houses in the immediate proximity.

I strongly encourage whatever plan the city finalizes in that area to allow for the businesses that are currently in that area to remain in order to serve the community.

Thank you for your time.

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From:



Duke Street land use - Alexandria Commons

Date:

Monday, September 14, 2026 8:55:56 PM

Good evening Christian and planning team,

I am writing to express my strong concerns regarding the draft recommendations for the Extended Duke Street Land Use Plan, specifically the proposal to convert the Alexandria Commons shopping plaza into high-density residential/commercial uses.

While I support the city's overall transit and housing goals, redeveloping this specific plaza undermines the existing economic and social fabric of our neighborhood. The surrounding Quaker Hill community is already a model of successful transit-oriented development and housing diversity, featuring a strong balance of market-rate affordable units and city-owned housing.

Because our immediate neighborhood lacks a dedicated public park or community center, Alexandria Commons serves as our primary community amenity and public square. It is a vital, walkable hub where neighbors connect, older adults can easily shop for daily needs, and local residents find accessible employment. Forcing this retail offline for years during a massive redevelopment will harm our community. Furthermore, there is a significant risk that the displaced businesses will be replaced by higher-end, expensive stores that do not align with the budget or needs of current neighborhood residents.

Instead of dismantling a thriving community asset, I urge the City of Alexandria to meet its housing density and equity goals by redeveloping the adjacent city-owned ARHA Cameron Valley homes into a high-density mixed-income community. This approach has already proven very successful in Old Town, and our neighborhood deserves the same thoughtful, equitable investment.

I strongly encourage the city to preserve the retail footprint of Alexandria Commons as a critical community asset, and redirect high-density housing development to other properties.

Thank you for your time and consideration of the neighborhood's perspective.

Sincerely,



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September 14, 2026

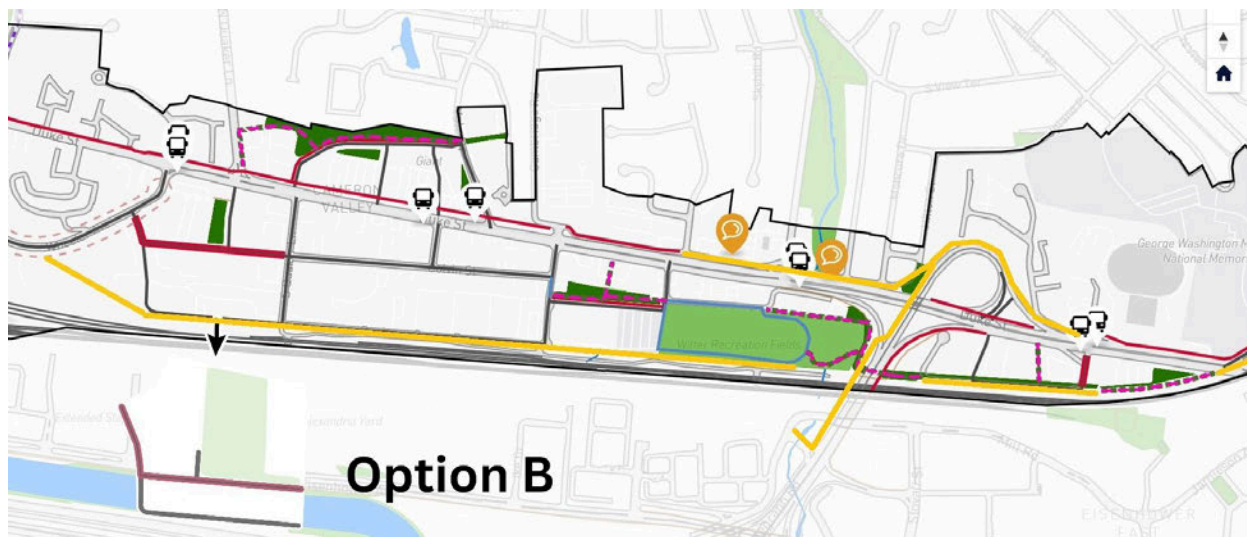


Dear Mr. Brandt,

The Bicycle and Pedestrian Advisory Committee (BPAC), a nonprofit which promotes walking and bicycling in Alexandria, appreciates the work you and your team have done on the Duke St Land Use Plan and the feedback you have previously incorporated from our group and other residents. We write to request you include several additional improvements into the plan as approved at our September 14 meeting.

To provide a more continuous pedestrian and bicycle route, please include an active transportation facility along S Quaker Ln to Business Center Dr and along the latter street to Witter Field. Pedestrian and bicycle facilities are far less functional when they have significant gaps, are indirect or require ascending hills. This active transportation facility can be a combination of off-street trails and interim shared on-street bicycle and pedestrian facilities.

Similarly, the Telegraph Rd overpass is a significant obstacle for people walking and biking. We request that the Plan include a recommendation to study its removal to bring the intersection to grade, replacement of its slip lane onto eastbound Duke St with a signalized intersection, and reconfiguration to provide a direct active transportation link around its north side and across to Mill Rd.



See yellow lines highlighting the gaps in the proposed bicycle and pedestrian routes.

Thank you for you and your team's work and we look forward to seeing a final product!

Ken Notis
Chair, Bicycle and Pedestrian Advisory Committee

From:

[REDACTED]

Alexandria project

Date:

Friday, July 24, 2026 4:03:34 PM

[REDACTED]

Hello Mr Brandt. I am a long time resident of the Quaker Hill Condominium. I have seen all the changes happening in this area since 1992, and I am convinced that adding more condos and apartments will ruin the little community we have here. Adding more people to an already congested area will not benefit anyone. Specially when you will eliminate Giant and the other businesses at the Alexandria Commons center. There is no other supermarket close by that will replace Giant. There is no Urgent care facility close by either. I am convinced that the member of this board/ committee, do not live or travel through this community or Duke street. I oppose to this proposal/ project that will destroy the Quaker Hill community. Please consider re evaluating this proposal. No one who lives in this area will benefit from it.

[REDACTED]

Sent from my iPhone

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From:

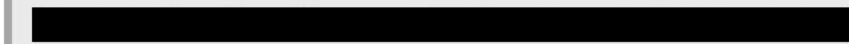


Date:



Public comment - Duke Street land use plan

Tuesday, September 15, 2026 8:17:39 PM



Dear Mr. Brandt,

I am writing as a senior citizen and a long-term Quaker Hill resident to express my concerns regarding the proposal to designate the Alexandria Commons shopping center (3101 Duke Street) for high-density residential redevelopment.

While I understand the city's goals for expanding housing, the existing Giant grocery store at Alexandria Commons provides a critical lifeline for our community. For numerous senior citizens, people with disabilities, and residents who do not own cars, this location is the only accessible, walking-distance option to purchase fresh food and essential medication.

Replacing this essential commercial hub with apartment buildings would inflict disproportionate harm on vulnerable populations by eliminating pedestrian access to an affordable grocery store. Furthermore, even if the city mandates a grocery store in the ground floor of a new development, the community faces a multi-year construction window. Losing a grocery store for years during construction would create an immediate food desert for the neighborhood's seniors and other residents who cannot easily travel to alternative locations.

Food security and neighborhood stability must not be secondary to density goals. I strongly urge the planning department to amend the Duke Street Land Use Plan to explicitly safeguard our existing essential retail footprint, or to legally guarantee that the current grocery store remains fully operational and uninterrupted until a suitable, walking-distance replacement is actively open to the public.

Thank you for your time and consideration of the neighborhood's seniors and pedestrian communities.

Sincerely,



Quaker Hill condo resident

Sent from my Galaxy

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**QUAKER HILL COMMUNITY ASSOCIATION &
QUAKER HILL CONDOMINIUM**

Alexandria, Virginia 22314
September 15, 2026

VIA ELECTRONIC DELIVERY

The Honorable Mayor and Members of the Alexandria City Council
City Hall, 301 King Street
Alexandria, VA 22314

CC:

James F. Parajon, City Manager
Carrie Beach, AICP, Division Chief, Neighborhood Planning and Community Development
Christian Brandt, AICP, Urban Planner III, Department of Planning & Zoning

**SUBJECT: Formal Feedback and Position Statement on the Working Draft
Recommendations of the Duke Street Land Use Plan**

Dear Mayor and Members of City Council:

This letter is submitted jointly on behalf of the Board of Directors of the **Quaker Hill Community Association** and the Board of Directors of the **Quaker Hill Condominium**. Together, we represent the hundreds of homeowners, residents, and families living in the single house, townhomes, and condominium building that comprise the Quaker Hill community. Our neighborhood directly borders the Alexandria Commons commercial center and sits adjacent to the Cameron Valley area. Because our community stands directly along the boundary of the proposed planning envelope, the land-use designations, building heights, and transportation assumptions in the **Duke Street Land Use Plan** will directly determine the daily safety, structural stability, and quality of life of our residents for generations.

Following our formal discussions with City Planning and Zoning staff on August 12, 2026, and subsequent deliberations by our respective Boards, we submit this formal feedback prior to the close of the public comment period on September 15, 2026. While we support the thoughtful, mixed-use modernization of aging commercial strip retail, we cannot endorse the current draft plan without critical modifications to building scale, environmental protections, transportation sequencing, and neighborhood buffering.

I. Who We Are: Quaker Hill's Unique Identity and History

Quaker Hill is an established, diverse, multi-family residential neighborhood nestled on the hillside between Duke Street, Quaker Lane, and Telegraph Road. Our community is defined by a balanced mix of four-story multi-family condominium buildings, traditional multi-story

townhomes, shared tree-lined parkways, and common recreational amenities. Crucially, **Quaker Hill is one of Alexandria's original and most successful models of inclusive, mixed-income housing.** Approximately one-third of the lots and units across our community are owned and operated by the Alexandria Redevelopment and Housing Authority (ARHA). Our market-rate owners and ARHA residents share the same breezeways, parking lots, playgrounds, and community governance.

Our feedback is not rooted in reflexive opposition to growth or density; as a community that has successfully lived the reality of mixed-income housing for decades, our position is rooted in ground-level operational realities. We urge City Council to recognize that development capacity must not outpace the physical, environmental, and infrastructural tolerance of adjacent residential neighborhoods.

II. Core Community Concerns and Required Plan Modifications

1. Building Heights, Incompatible Scale, and Neighborhood Transitions

The draft plan designates the Alexandria Commons site for an allowable base height of **85 feet (approximately 7–8 stories)**, which can further escalate to **110 feet (up to 10–11 stories)** under the City's Section 7700 affordable housing bonus provisions.

Placing 8- to 11-story high-rise buildings directly adjacent to existing 3- to 4-story garden condominiums and 2- to 3-story townhomes creates an abrupt, incompatible wall of concrete and glass that overwhelms our community. During our meeting, staff indicated that these figures are merely "maximum allowances" rather than guaranteed approvals, and that reductions could be negotiated later during individual development reviews.

- **Our Position:** The Land Use Plan itself is the regulatory instrument where maximum building envelopes and transitions must be established. Deferring scale decisions to subsequent developer negotiations strips existing residents of structural protections once development rights are codified.
- **Required Action:** The Small Area Plan must mandate a mandatory stepped-down height transition along the northern and eastern boundaries of Alexandria Commons. Building heights abutting Quaker Hill residential properties should be strictly capped at **45–50 feet (3 to 4 stories)**, with taller massing (up to a reasonable ceiling) concentrated solely along Duke Street and interior retail spines.

2. Geotechnical Hazards: Steep Slopes, Marine Clay, Sunlight, and Erosion

The topography separating Quaker Hill from the Alexandria Commons commercial site is steep, geotechnically sensitive, and underlain by unstable marine clay. Our community has already invested substantial capital into complex retaining wall, drainage, and slope-stabilization projects to prevent land slippage and structural damage.

A high-rise development (85 to 110 feet) erected immediately below or adjacent to this slope will cast perpetual shade over our hillside. Natural sunlight is essential for drying this

moisture-retaining soil. Prolonged soil saturation, combined with extensive subterranean excavation and increased stormwater runoff from high-density redevelopment, creates severe risks of accelerated slope erosion, mudslides, and foundation instability for existing residential structures.

- **Our Position:** Deferring geotechnical and shadow studies to the post-adoption development review phase is unacceptable when private property integrity is at stake.
- **Required Action:** City Council should incorporate mandatory environmental and geotechnical constraints into the plan text. Prior to establishing height envelopes on parcels adjacent to Quaker Hill, the City must require comprehensive micro-climate shadow modeling, marine clay soil stability analyses, and localized stormwater impact studies. The plan must stipulate that negative slope or drainage impacts will trigger an automatic, non-negotiable reduction in permissible building height.

3. Transportation Gridlock and Flawed Planning Sequencing

The segment of Duke Street between Quaker Lane and Telegraph Road is already one of the most severe bottlenecks in the City of Alexandria. On daily commutes, our residents experience extreme delays attempting to exit Yale Drive, with traffic routinely backing up west of Quaker Lane and neighborhood streets enduring aggressive cut-through traffic.

City staff acknowledged that **30% to 40% of daily traffic on our immediate segment consists of regional cut-through trips** bypassing regional highway backups to reach I-495 and Telegraph Road. Yet, the City is treating the previously approved *Duke Street in Motion* transitway project as a fixed, unalterable background condition that cannot be re-evaluated.

- **Our Position:** There is a critical disconnect between transportation and land use. Authorizing massive new residential and commercial density at Alexandria Commons and Cameron Valley while refusing to revisit the underlying capacity and lane configurations of Duke Street will paralyze the corridor. Bus rapid transit alone will not eliminate the 30–40% regional cut-through volume.
- **Required Action:** The City must synchronize the Duke Street Land Use Plan with updated, real-world traffic modeling that accounts for the maximum buildout of both Alexandria Commons and the ARHA Cameron Valley site. The City and VDOT must establish concrete interventions to deter regional cut-through traffic before new high-density trip generators are approved.

4. Cumulative Density: Alexandria Commons and ARHA Cameron Valley

The plan envisions concurrent, major redevelopments at Alexandria Commons and the adjacent ARHA Cameron Valley property. While staff noted that high-level yield studies incorporate maximum potential build-outs, no clear projections were shared regarding the cumulative unit counts, population influx, emergency services demands, or school

enrollment impacts across both properties combined.

- **Our Position:** Planning Alexandria Commons in a silo without fully disclosing the specific scale, density, and unit counts anticipated for Cameron Valley hides the true cumulative impact on our shared street network, public safety resources, and utility infrastructure.
- **Required Action:** City Planning & Zoning must publish a comprehensive, cumulative infrastructure impact study covering both Alexandria Commons and Cameron Valley prior to City Council's final plan adoption.

5. Parking Garages, Sightlines, and Buffering

Under current development economics, underground structured parking is significantly more expensive than above-ground parking decks. If developers opt for above-ground structures, the rear elevations—facing Quaker Hill—risk becoming massive multi-story concrete garages.

- **Our Position:** Merely "screening" above-ground parking is insufficient to protect the residential character, air quality, and visual sightlines of homes whose balconies and windows face the parcel boundary.
- **Required Action:** The plan must require that any above-ground parking decks be fully wrapped with active residential or commercial uses, or set back substantially behind an expansive, preserved green buffer with mature tree canopy. Subterranean parking should be strongly incentivized.

6. Public Safety, Crime Prevention, and Park Maintenance

Existing retail operations at Alexandria Commons have experienced ongoing public safety challenges, including carjackings, retail theft, and loitering. The proposal to introduce a new public park adjacent to residential property raises valid concerns regarding surveillance, lighting, maintenance, and boundaries.

- **Our Position:** Public spaces must not become unmonitored congregating areas that overflow into private condominium common elements.
- **Required Action:** The plan must incorporate mandatory Crime Prevention Through Environmental Design (CPTED) principles, require direct coordination with the Alexandria Police Department (APD) Community Liaison, mandate robust security lighting, and require permanent physical barriers (fencing and landscape buffers) along the boundary with Quaker Hill.

III. Conclusion: A Balanced Path Forward

The Boards, homeowners, and residents of Quaker Hill want a vibrant, walkable, and modern Duke Street corridor. However, the current framework asks the existing residential community to bear the severe burdens of traffic gridlock, shade, slope instability, and visual disruption, while granting developers unprecedented height and density allowances under the guise of future negotiation.

We formally request that City Council direct the Department of Planning & Zoning to:

1. **Incorporate mandatory height step-downs** capping massing at 45–50 feet adjacent to residential properties.
2. **Require geotechnical, slope, and shadow feasibility thresholds** within the plan text to protect our hillsides.
3. **Harmonize the land-use density projections** with transportation modeling, addressing the 30–40% regional cut-through bottleneck before approving expanded trip generation.
4. **Publish cumulative infrastructure analyses** that explicitly integrate the future Cameron Valley ARHA redevelopment.

We appreciate the dialogue held with staff thus far and look forward to presenting our testimony during upcoming public hearings.

Respectfully submitted,

Board of Directors, Quaker Hill Community Association
Board of Directors, Quaker Hill Condominium