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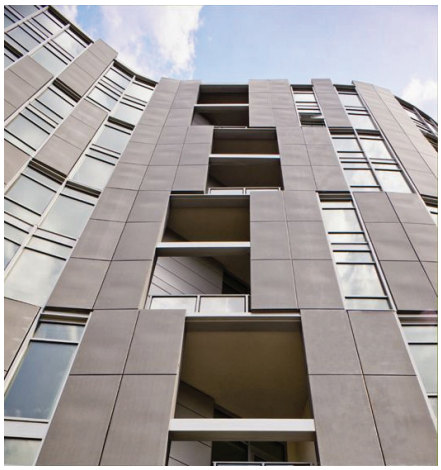
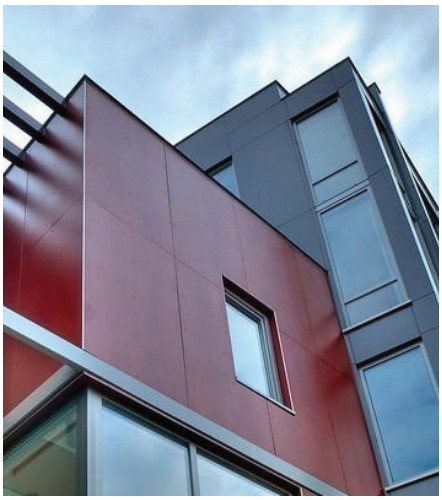
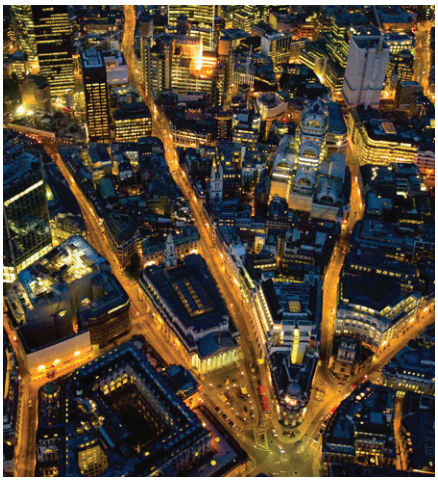
Urban Design-Plan Framework







Urban Design – Plan Framework

Creating North Potomac Yard as a great place will involve the collective experience of architecture, public spaces, public art, urban design, and landscape design. An exclusive focus on density and land use will not result in a high quality cohesive urban community, or an enduring sustainable place that will bring lasting value to the City. The combination of innovative and high quality architecture, environmentally sustainable elements and great public spaces will create attractive places to live - places that will express the culture and tradition of Alexandria, while also enabling this area to be an effective long-term economic engine for the City. It is crucial that as projects proceed, buildings, open space and the public realm be held to the highest standards of quality, ensuring that all of the redevelopment provides amenities and economic value for the City. **Quality begets quality.**

A. Urban Design Framework

The urban design framework plan (Figure 3) provides the basic structure for an interconnected series of streets, blocks, and parks. The required street grid is based on Alexandria's historic pattern of pedestrian-scale blocks, with required variations in the street grid pattern at the Metrorail station and Crescent Gateway Park, to create a distinctive and memorable street pattern at these visually prominent locations. The Metrorail station serves as a focal design element for Metro Square neighborhood. The framework streets will connect to existing streets within the rest of Potomac Yard, Potomac Yard Arlington, and connect or align with neighborhoods to the west. The Plan recommends the adoption of Design Guidelines to augment the urban design elements of the Plan.

> **"If buildings are beautiful, higher density compounds that beauty. Conversely, if buildings are ugly, then higher density compounds that ugliness."**
>
> *- Vince Graham*

Figure 3. Framework Plan and Street Hierarchy

Figure 4. North Potomac Yard Neighborhoods

***Note** The names given to neighborhoods, parks, and streets throughout the Plan are for reference purposes only, and subject to additional approval processes where applicable. The blocks, streets and uses within the Flexible Metrorail Zone shall be subject to Recommendation 3.2.*

Note:

Flexible Metrorail Zone

B. Street Hierarchy

A street hierarchy based on function identifies prominent streets and streets for parking and service access (Figure 3). “A” streets are the most prominent streets; “B” streets connect “A” and “C” streets and provide general pedestrian and vehicular circulation for the neighborhoods; and “C” streets provide a means of access and service entries to parking. The Design Guidelines may provide for service entries on “B” streets when buildings have no alley or “C” street frontage. The streets vary in width depending on their function, hierarchy and scale of adjoining buildings. The required width of the streets and sidewalks capture the characteristics of great urban streets. All streets will be designed to favor the pedestrian and keep vehicle speeds low. The required street cross-sections for each street will be depicted in future design guidelines.

C. Creation of Three Distinct Urban Neighborhoods

A defining element of the City is its distinct neighborhoods, such as Old Town, Del Ray, Northeast, Lynhaven, Rosemont, and Parker-Gray. The City also includes numerous emerging or transitioning neighborhoods such as Carlyle, Eisenhower East, and Landmark/Van Dorn. The differences in identity, character and scale of the various neighborhoods complement each other and contribute to the richness of the urban experience of the City. Consistent with the City's urban tradition of a series of interconnected, distinctive neighborhoods, the Plan requires three unique and identifiable neighborhoods (Figure 4).

- **Metro Square Neighborhood**
- **Market Neighborhood**
- **Crescent Gateway Neighborhood**

The Metro Square Neighborhood

This neighborhood is the transit hub of North Potomac Yard, where the Metrorail station, dedicated high-capacity transitway, and local and circulator bus services will converge. Two important public spaces define the character of the neighborhood, including the square park at the center of the neighborhood, and a possible internal pedestrian connection. The neighborhood is characterized by a mix of uses, but will be predominantly office, with ground floor retail. In addition, uses such as entertainment and/or live performance arts are encouraged. An entertainment district could provide a unique identity for this neighborhood and would differentiate this new town center from others in the region. The entertainment and theatre uses can utilize the office parking during the evening hours, and add evening activity within the neighborhood.

Figure 5. Perspective View of Metrorail Station and Metro Square Park

The Market Neighborhood

This neighborhood is the heart of North Potomac Yard, where a significant amount of retail and restaurants will create an exciting regional destination. This is the neighborhood where large format retailers could be located (see *Analysis of Market Conditions in Appendix 2*). This neighborhood will provide the greatest mix of uses, offering a range of housing and office uses above the ground floor retail uses. Because of the retail and adjoining Metrorail station, one of the blocks may include an internal pedestrian walkway/connection.

Figure 6. Perspective View of Crescent Park

Crescent Gateway Neighborhood
Located at the northern portion of the site at the gateway to the City, this neighborhood consists of primarily residential uses, with other uses such as a hotel and a possible school. The neighborhood will be defined by its Crescent Park and will take advantage of the adjacent Four Mile Run and park. The Crescent Park creates a residential address for the adjoining larger scale residential buildings. Buildings in this neighborhood are situated to enjoy views of the Potomac River and the Washington, D.C. skyline. A signature element of the neighborhood will be the required curved building facades adjacent to Crescent Park. Taller buildings are located within the central portion of the neighborhood and step down in height to the existing smaller scale neighborhoods to the west and the George Washington Memorial Parkway to the east.

Figure 7. Gateways and Vistas

D. Gateways and Vistas

Similar to Old Town and the remainder of Potomac Yard, the east-west streets visually terminate into the Potomac River or a linear park (except within the Metro Square Neighborhood) affording terminating water and open space views (Figure 7). There are opportunities for buildings to reinforce visually prominent locations along Route 1, Potomac Avenue and the George Washington Memorial Parkway. The scale, character, elements and orientation of new buildings are required to highlight the designated gateways and vistas. Signature facades and gateway elements draw attention to specific points of interest and mark the location of entries and places for each of the neighborhoods. The Plan recommends variety in building massing, design, and height. The plan also recommends distinctive building tops for taller buildings.

E. Urban and Building Form

The urban form is based on the best of Alexandria's design elements such as pedestrian scale at the street level while creating distinctive urban buildings and forms. The buildings are intended to be contemporary, exhibit design excellence, and reinforce the public realm and character of each neighborhood. The higher density, mixed-use buildings in some of the neighborhoods will provide the urban density to help activate retail and restaurants as well as reinforce a sense of place, urban life and vitality for Potomac Yard.
The basic bulk and form of buildings will be governed by the block-specific Development Summary (Table 3), Maximum Building Heights (Figure 17), and Minimum Building Heights (Figure 18). Collectively, these standards will ensure that appropriate densities are maintained and that buildings will create an urban street wall from which the streets and open spaces will be defined and framed. Densities and building heights are discussed in more detail in *Chapter 4: Land Use*. Future design guidelines will address urban and building form elements such as building stepbacks, variation in heights, and form.

Figure 8. Image of North Potomac Yard

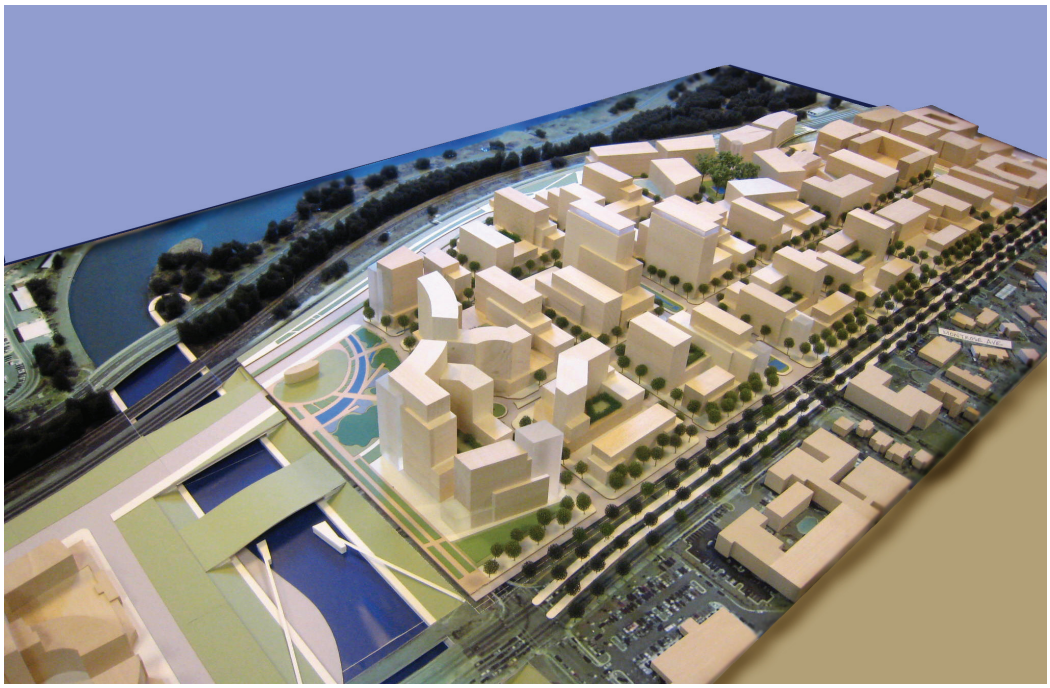


Figure 10. Illustrative Plan #1

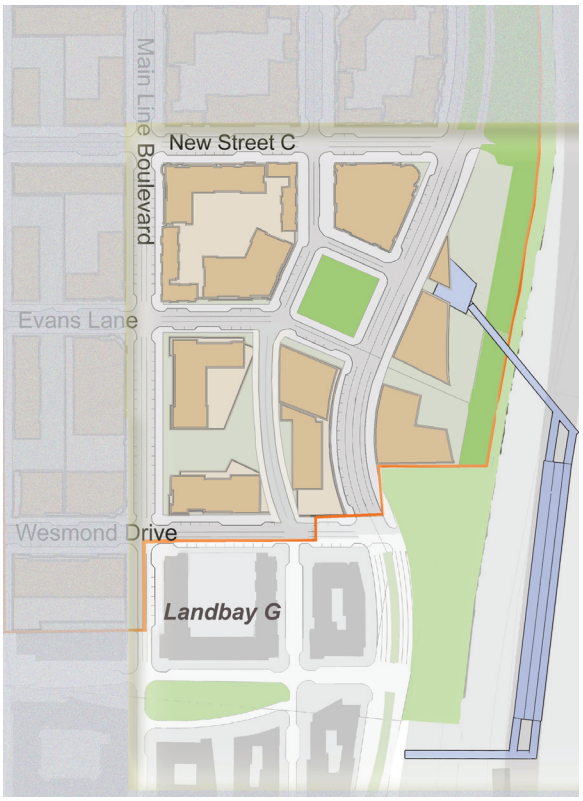


Figure 11. Illustrative Plan #2

F. Flexible Metrorail Zone

The final design and location of the Metrorail station requires additional coordination with the Washington Metropolitan Area Transit Authority (WMATA), the National Park Service (NPS), and other applicable Federal and State agencies. In addition, although the conceptual route for the dedicated high-capacity transitway has been finalized, the type of vehicle that will be utilized (bus rapid transit and/or streetcar) and the location of the stations are not yet finalized. Within the Flexible Metrorail Zone (Figure 9), the final configuration of the streets, blocks, buildings, and open space will be determined as part of the development review process, subject to the intent and recommendations provided in the Plan. Figures 10 and 11 represent two possible configurations of the Flexible Metrorail Zone.

The Flexible Metrorail Zone is envisioned as an urban place centered around the Metrorail station, Metro Square, and adjacent buildings. Key goals of the Flexible Metrorail Zone include:

- Creation of an urban Metrorail station which primarily serves pedestrians and not automobiles;
- Maximization of the accessibility of the Metrorail station and high-capacity transitway route and stations;
- Emphasis on connectivity at the Metrorail station and high-capacity transitway stations, and between modes;
- Maintenance of the overall curvilinear nature of Potomac Avenue;
- Maximization of building height and office density and memorable building forms in the vicinity of the Metrorail station;
- Provision of a centrally-located, well-defined urban park;
- Potomac Avenue (relocated) will connect to the planned street network to the North and South;
- Inclusion of a visual terminus for Water Street at Metro Square; and
- Provision of a meaningful connection to Landbay K.

Refer to recommendation 3.2 for the specific requirements within the Flexible Metrorail Zone.

Figure 9. Flexible Metrorail Zone

G. Public Art and History

Public art and historical interpretation help define a community, create a sense of place, celebrate the site's unique history, reinforce a design theme, engage and inspire the public, and add beauty to a space that will be enjoyed for generations to come. Consideration should be given to the integration of public art and historical references, interpretation and educational opportunities. The public art element of the Plan will need to be consistent with any city-wide public art funding policy and/or as required through the development review process. The Plan recommends a Public Art and History Interpretive Plan to integrate public art and history in a comprehensive way throughout the plan area

Note:
Specific deadline and submission requirements not specified for recommendations will be determined as part of the rezoning for the subject property.

URBAN DESIGN RECOMMENDATIONS

Framework Streets and Blocks

3.1 Require the streets and blocks depicted in the Framework Plan to be constructed as part of any redevelopment and dedicated to the City (Figure 3).

3.2 The final design and configuration of the streets, blocks, buildings, and open space with the Flexible Metrorail Zone (Figure 9) will be determined through the development review process. The final configuration of the streets, blocks, buildings, and open space shall be subject to the following:

a. An approximately 0.70 acre square-shaped park shall be centrally located within the Flexible Metrorail Zone. The park shall be surrounded on all sides by streets, and framed by buildings on each side.

b. Potomac Avenue (relocated) shall align and connect to the Potomac Avenue right-of-way south of Landbay F and to the final alignment of the Potomac Avenue (relocated) right-of-way to the north of the Flexible Metrorail Zone.

c. The overall curvilinear nature of Potomac Avenue (relocated) shall be maintained.

d. The shape of the buildings in plan and form within the Flexible Metrorail Zone shall create distinct and memorable three dimensional forms.

e. Buildings surrounding the centrally located park shall be required to provide a primary entrance facing the approximately 0.70 acre park.

f. Buildings on Potomac Avenue shall be required to provide a primary entrance facing Potomac Avenue.

g. Buildings will be required to have more than one entrance and/or through lobbies for buildings with multiple street frontages.

h. Pedestrian bridge(s) within the Flexible Metrorail Zone that access the Metrorail station shall be fully integrated into the design for the Metrorail station, adjoining buildings, and open space.

i. The alignment of Potomac Avenue (relocated) shall be such that Landbay K park is continuous.

j. Development blocks east of Potomac Avenue shall be sufficient size for market-acceptable building floor plates.

k. The blocks and buildings shall be subject to the minimum height and density provisions and other applicable zoning provisions, design guidelines, and the North Potomac Yard Small Area Plan.

l. The streets shall be configured to accommodate transit and transit stations.

m. Buildings should be designed to integrate transit stations and/or stops.

n. The streets shall be configured to provide a fine-grained interconnected street grid network and spacing consistent with and connecting to streets outside the Flexible Metrorail Zone.

o. Evans Lane is strongly encouraged to connect from Main Line Boulevard to Potomac Avenue (relocated).

URBAN DESIGN RECOMMENDATIONS (CONTINUED)

3.3 Require the street hierarchy to define space and differentiate the character of streets and neighborhoods (Figure 3).

3.4 Require streets to emphasize the pedestrian and bicycles.

3.5 Allow for internal pedestrian connections and alleys within the blocks.

3.6 Improve and enhance the Route 1 frontage with streetscape improvements, buildings, and landscaping.

Creation of Three Distinct Urban Neighborhoods

3.7 The parks depicted in the Framework Plan shall be required within each neighborhood as a defining element of each neighborhood (Figure 3).

3.8 Create three distinctive and unique neighborhoods. Encourage the use of history as inspiration for the design of the open space, public realm, and buildings. Encourage the use of public art to establish distinct neighborhood identities and create unifying themes for the neighborhoods

3.9 Encourage a mix of innovative building typologies within each neighborhood.

3.10 The Metrorail station shall serve as a focal design element for the Metro Square Neighborhood.

3.11 Explore the possibility of providing cultural and civic uses to reinforce the character of each neighborhood.

Gateways and Vistas

3.12a Require variety in building massing, design, and height.

3.12b Use heights and variety in heights, building materials, orientation, and dimensions to create distinctive building tops for taller buildings.

3.13 Provide distinctive building forms and architecture at the designated gateway locations (Figure 7).

Urban and Building Form

3.14 Balance the aesthetic and functional criteria of sustainable design.

3.15 Create an urban building scale and relationship between buildings, streets and open spaces that ensures urban relationships of the buildings and sidewalk, and maximizes walkability and the use of transit.

3.16 Require any building with government tenants or tenants who require security measures to meet the Vision, applicable provisions of the Master Plan and future design guidelines.

3.17 Adopt future design guidelines to implement the Vision of the Plan.

URBAN DESIGN RECOMMENDATIONS (CONTINUED)

Public Art and History

3.18 Require the submission of a Public Art & History Interpretive Plan for North Potomac Yard and explore relationships between public art and the history of the site.

3.19 Integrate small and large-scale public art which considers the history of the site, as well as thematic, artistic, and cultural ideas into new development and the public realm, including the following areas: trails, transit infrastructure, open spaces, buildings, site furnishings, lighting, gateways, and wayfinding.