

What's Next Alexandria Community Dialogue
November 15, 2012
Meeting Evaluations

1. What are your concerns?

- Better communications, 2-way
- I'm concerned about the economic and social divide that seems to be growing in Alexandria
- Transparency of developmental plans, long range, not short sighted for immediate monetary needs
- Affordable housing and public transportation
- Lack of affordable housing/very high cost of housing
- Concerned of the time it will take to accomplish something
- Over development
- Traffic congestion
- Taxes are too high
- Schools are poorly led; Superintendent, principals
- There is little connection between leaders and community members
- Every voice or point of view being represented
- Disappearing low cost of housing
- The cost of housing
- That nothing to being done to stop the abuse of landlords and city officials are doing nothing
- Lack of housing
- My ill husband and lack of work for both of us
- That we not allow a few very vocal people distract us from the mission
- Don't know what are the facts dividing the community
- Do not want issues or topics presented in a pre-planned menu of choices as those may not reflect the issues and topics most important to citizens; We need more open ended questions to learn what is important
- Will effort fundamentally impact the planning and transportation process?
- I am worried that this effort will be too focused on defining or improving a communication process rather than first understanding the problem we're trying to solve with an improved process; I'm not sure the problem is lack of participation. The mayor stated "we lead all others in the amount of participation by citizens." It may be better stated that the problem is how to strengthen the trust in a public participation process that leads to a better decision making process by the city.
- We need to reestablish trust in city government
- Poor quality decision-making on projects that result in civic unrest, marginalized expert input and questionable budget priorities
- A staff that leads and doesn't respond at a level that engenders meaningful dialogue leading to superior project decisions
- Alexandria waterfront river walk and sea wall from north of Alexandria to Holmes Run and Backlick Run
- That this is anything the city leadership will actually take to heart
- Speaker was too political

- That the group can reach consensus on how civil discourse/involvement without alienating groups of people (that the crazies will scare off the newcomers)
- What will be done with this
- Facilitator expressed how people need to “let go,” but a lot of citizen distrust in the city
- Traffic/congestion/cross-city connection
- Development/over-development, integration of all areas of city via good urban planning
- Tax base improve
- Architecture, not deplete Old Town- form in quality
- Public transit- continued development, access, cost
- Quality of life in all parts of city
- Diversity
- Presentation of open space/parks/garden/community garden
- Budget
- The concern is that people with different opinions are not at the table
- I was a bit disappointed in the guest speaker
- That collaboration will not continue effectively
- That it will be limited to this population and not begin again to be representative of all demographics before it proceeds
- How to reach out to those that have not attended or participated in the survey ~1600 people took the survey and 1090~160 attended the forum, how do we get these folks involved
- How do we connect with our community stakeholders?
- Too many public participation meetings are run by city staff and/or consultants who come with something to sell and keep selling it whatever citizens have to say
- Lack of diversity at this event
- I almost filled out an online form to submit myself for an open position on a commission. But the form suggested introducing myself to commission members. Why? If you want new people and new ideas, why is it necessary to find and meet commission members?
- That Alexandria citizens engage with each other and decision-makers with more civility and willingness to compromise
- That I don't know enough about my community to have an opinion
- Too much time spent speaking off topic
- Not enough time for table discussion
- Apparently some people believed this meeting would touch on specific city issues - perhaps the focus might have been communicated more clearly
- Mayor Euille still doesn't sound like he “gets” the importance of civic engagement. Every time he says that Alexandria is one of the most transparent cities in America, I groan
- Our timeline; I would love to see a more aggressive timeline
- Only that this process be kept focused and, well, not too “processy”
- This exercise will turn out like previous “Round Tables” with no results
- If the discussion is too contentious, the number of people attending in the future will be much smaller

- That each person has an opportunity to express thoughts regarding issues
- Individuals at meeting who tried to hijack the process
- Our collective contribution of time needs to be focused on forward, positive, creative solutions
- Integrate 21st century skills training into the fabric of our community; arts and creative thinking are mandatory
- Will this really make a difference? Some people seem very angry
- Flooding in Old Town and surrounding lowlands
- I agree with Carolyn Tukensmeyer that our public discourse has become disrespectful and continues to be
- Move more efficiently through the preliminary matters and welcoming remarks
- People do not understand how these civic decisions affect them, so few participate in process
- Many communities (minorities) were not present here tonight. There is a loss for us. Perhaps there could be an effort to reach our citizen groups, tenants and workers etc., so that we all could be together
- How to engage the unengaged, in order to get a more representative and diverse participation
- Maintaining energy and focus on the effort
- Greatest concern is those with loudest voice will dominate the dialogue
- What are the next steps? What are the ultimate goals of these meetings? I didn't think these issues were addressed
- Did not represent the diversity of the city
- Lack of civility at the beginning cost precious time
- Seek ways to improve diversity
- Thank you for this opportunity and for the graceful handling of the negative comments at the beginning of the meeting. Improving the processes for civic engagement will make our government and community better
- Nice to brainstorm on how to get more involvement
- That at the end of all this, there will be no innovations implemented, no new ways of the city reaching out to inform and engage me
- I have higher level of trust after tonight, but still fear
- That city officials are not really wanting input, comments, etc. because some people don't communicate respectfully and ruin "public comment" for the rest of us
- None, this is an exciting process
- Changing community/quality of life; did not move to Alexandria to be continually bombarded by changes for the worse
- City that does not involve citizens in meaningful way (we get to choose color)
- City losing soul
- Bad schools; we don't have any kids between (7-18) in our neighborhoods
- Development business model that is not working for us
- Are you listening?
- City staff and officials have made extremely derogatory comments towards civic association
- People trying to hijack the process
- Insufficient time

- Quality of life
- Cost of living
- Infrastructure
- Taxes
- Middle-income families unable to afford to live in Alexandria
- I'm concerned the individuals with agendas of their own will attempt again to derail the process. I thought those who spoke so stridently at the start of the last meeting (even threatening to leave if they did not prevail) lacked any understanding that this process is about US, not THEM, including 100,000+ residents who were not in the room. We are designing the means for the most residents possible to have their voices heard, not just those who attend meetings and shout the loudest. I thought the situation was handled very well allowing us, belatedly, to get on with the tasks at hand.
- The timeline for a quality plan to be put together
- True demographically represented input
- My concern is that persons will hold on to their personal experiences that may not have been positive in past engagements. This may prevent us from moving forward with valued conversations and respected by the group.
- Increasing traffic congestion, particularly at the West End.
- Increasing property taxes.
- Seemingly indifference of the city staff to serve the public interests
- Maybe I misunderstood the purpose of the meeting, but I thought it was a waste of time and City money. I thought there would be a detailed discussion of the poll, focusing on items most respondents considered important. I saw no value in the presentation by Dr. Carolyn J. Lukensmeyer. She talked a lot, but said little.
- Beauregard Small Area Plan - planned parallel road that would be right under my bedroom window. Heights of buildings, density that Duke Realty is planning right behind my home.

2. Do you have any suggestions for improvements?

- I don't have Cable TV. Can you use the channels that Ethiopian TV uses- 40-45
- Involve the stakeholders from the beginning and let the group shape the process
- We need an implementation/action plan that is citizen led with a funding mechanism to support the effort
- Too late to plan for schools, tennis courts, swim pools, etc, unless in what little land is left
- Don't start with an idea of where you want to end up. If you begin with your outcome before you start the process, then the process itself is moot
- Good programs exist. Keep them
- Info online; way to participate online if we can't participate in person
- Let's dispense with consultants making presentations. We need to talk to each other. Let's talk about the issues identified in the survey as being most important
- To proceed with community engagement meeting and invite all community members from all pockets of Alexandria
- Continue to acknowledge other points of view and offer more substantive engagement on relevant issues

- Create laws to stop abuses of landlords and high cost of housing
- The city has the power and can solve the housing problem
- While guest speaker was somewhat interesting, did not feel it contributed to evening's goals, but overall thank you for doing this and caring enough
- This is a good first step
- If comments not allowed then don't allow them. Program started late because comments allowed and commentators would not stop talking
- Restructured city government that will leave the at-large system in the past
- Combine this approach with scientific surveys so that the voice of the entire community is heard and vocal people do not dominate
- Limit statements of citizen's outrage to 5 minutes ([redacted] gets 2 minutes max.)
- I enjoyed the engagement but I don't really know what we accomplished
- Don't let one or two people in the audience try to take over or change the tone/mission of the meeting
- Maybe a half-hour more time
- Good urban planning
- Infrastructure investment
- Duke St/Eisenhower St connectors and improved transit
- Ask a third party facilitator to come in instead of people we know
- This seems to be focused on the planning process. Perhaps make it clear what city processes are fair game. Will we get to have our various boards, commissions, etc.
- Begin with demographics to restart this process toward defining a process. (age, geographic sector, economic)
- Unconventional thinking is a good step
- How to encourage other community organizations to work together to increase feedback
- Perhaps a more structured meeting. Time allocations should provide for larger discussion
- This group should have a town hall style meeting so everyone can hear all others' ideas in real time. That is the only way to reach a true consensus
- Make it a Saturday day, provide food and childcare
- Can get noisy and difficult to hear. Tables further apart?
- Use a few concrete policy issues (not controversial to start) as part of the exercises
- Very difficult to get information in Alexandria said as a newcomer to Alexandria
- Some voices appear very loud while others not heard
- Keep speakers on time. Don't let them get us so behind
- Gavel down persistent loudmouths. I resent the waste of my time by hecklers
- No one will listen even if I suggest them
- As we move forward, set the parameters for discourse upfront
- Chair of the meeting should be careful not to display attitude. John Porter was not gracious; thank goodness Tom Gates stood up and displayed much more civility toward the early questioners in the audience
- Longer time to discuss
- Setting the forum and foundation for conversation
- A good exercise to do, not sure it needs to be drawn out until May 2013. Recommend speeding it up

- Advise how to view the presentation; I noted it was being taped
- Someone like Porter must stay in charge
- Timekeeper with authority
- We need structure and ground rules to be sure people aren't intimidated by other citizens who wish to dominate the process
- Time seems too short but we also need to end by 9pm
- Perhaps at the same scenario but with fewer items to deal with to really find solutions
- Less "live" audio characteristics in the room; hard to hear conversation at table
- One suggestion is to bring people to these meetings that do not typically get involved. I feel I knew about at least half of the people
- Would have like to have results of community feedback survey at our table
- More time for small table discussion
- Set context, not just discuss individual issues without context
- Talk about responsibilities of citizenship
- The agitators in our community are well known for disrupting public meetings. They did this tonight, insulted our mayor, and caused the agenda to be interrupted. The negative impact was a shortage of time for the activities, what a shame. These people must be controlled
- Stick to the time allotments in the agenda a little better
- Would have liked to hear the full presentation of Dr. Luttmeyer
- Hold firm at podium
- Stick to the agenda in terms of time
- When I think of "what's next" for Alexandria, I think of the next generation and I didn't see a lot of young residents here
- More outreach
- Thanks for online option to participate
- Ban [redacted] from future meetings
- Please tell us what other communities do and how it works, e.g. cities Portland and Portsmouth. Do they have more online dialogue? Do they push info to the communities in a different way? We might like their processes
- For small group discussions, employ method to ensure member selection is more random (e.g. some of the tables at tonight's meeting seemed homogenous). Suggest geography in the city is most important factor to use
- Engage in dialogue not selling
- Respect citizens
- Hold staff accountable; do not use them or let them be political tools
- Established ground rules
- The city needs to be involved in community dialog
- Residents communicate with each other, even when they disagree
- The city needs to take responsibility for dialog with the residents. The city manager didn't show up for the meeting he invited residents to attend
- The city should not pay consultants for something the city staff can do better (this consultant did a rant that wasn't any different than an amateur poetry open mike)
- Repeat the objectives of this process over and over. If someone chooses not to participate to achieve those objectives fine. I agree there are other, perhaps

imperfect (for them), forums to air their views. That will have to do until we design something better. I hope they let us get on with it or it will take even longer to accomplish these goals. If they don't, I suggest separating them to their own table and allowing them to vent there rather than commanding the attention of the entire room.

- Reach out to more of the citizens associations personally
- Get the elected officials intimately involved in this process, not a bunch of consultants and staff
- We really need to develop a way all concerns are heard and persons not feeling like they are on a fast moving train.
- The "What's Next, Alexandria?" forum is an excellent idea from the city leaders. We need to further advertise and capitalize on its potential to resolve citizen's concerns and hold city politicians responsible.
- There are limits to "growth." If the city doesn't have the money/funding for a project; it should not borrow or raise taxes to proceed with the project.
- Follow through with previous proposals or explain why they're stalled. I've attended numerous meetings about changing Landmark but nothing has been done.
- Serious listening by City staff involved and being open minded to a win/win solution for all - rather than just being in a box and saying this is the way it has to be.

3. How would you explain in 2 sentences what we have accomplished at this meeting?

- It's a good start, lots of interest to build on
- Well managed when two women tried to derail at start
- I've emphasized the importance of moving from planning to action
- More engaged citizenry
- Common goals achieved
- Good communication of ideas
- Generating new ideas and models for city governance to break out of its static systems
- We gave voice to a variety of thoughts and committed to move forward with a community-driven process
- I think it was a good opportunity to meet more Alexandrians
- I enjoyed meeting those at my table and hearing their concerns
- Substantively, nothing. Presentation was boring
- This meeting is a start and was encouraging. Should proceed as planned
- The process in which we will pattern our civil engagement
- The opportunity to know that you are trying to be involved in the community.
- It has been very important because we are all free to speak what we think
- Get to meet some neighbors/views
- Began a dialogue on a better process for meaningful citizen engagement
- Reinforced principles for discourse
- Extremely limited explanation and understanding of why we're here and what the real problem we face is restoring trust in our communication process(es) and our government solutions

- A reaffirming of the fact that engagement is broken and that this exercise will fail because it mimics past efforts that have failed
- Breakout sessions work
- Beginning to get different people talking with respect for all opinions
- Understood how the process is supposed to work; beginning work in working with each other as strangers
- We began to think differently and more sensitively about participation in process, what we can bring to the table and how that participation will enrich us as well as the community
- Somewhat received a sense of how engagement can be accomplished
- It's a start and I'm willing to be patient
- An expression of some goals has been drafted tonight
- A demonstration of investment and concern for improvement
- 100+ people have come together in one room for a unified purpose. These people shared and worked together
- I think this started the dialogue. This is a good first step in moving forward to identify how Alexandrians can become more engaged effectively
- Tonight brought attention to the goals and challenges in creating a more active citizenry
- One meeting does not show any accomplishment. Only time will tell if this exercise was fruitful
- A beginning. A process
- Fostered an atmosphere of trust
- We discussed democracy based processes for citizen engagement with city government
- First step toward more civility and engagement
- Introduction of compromise as a concept
- A start of a conversation
- Participated and observed
- Nothing but a lovefest for city hall and elected officials; still not listening to citizens
- Set the expectations for the process
- Setting the forum and foundation for conversation
- Identified a common concept of what "engagement" means
- I'll be able to access after I've seen what happens after this meeting
- Sets a pretty good tone for the next meeting
- Fostered a feeling of acceptance. Made me feel committed to this process
- Wonderful speakers and sponsors create great citizen action
- You have successfully brought members from all over the community together and engaged us in a process of getting to know each other and starting to talk about things that matter
- A chance to think about being an engaged citizen
- Thank you for a great and productive meeting. You all did a terrific job facilitating and keeping us on task
- We have brought the crossroads to evidence with the chance to participate for the good of all
- We discussed good civic discourse

- Diverse groups convened and discussed important ideas
- We came together with hope for a greater degree of engagement, but we expect to achieve positive results for our city
- We identified some of the key elements for successful citizen engagement
- We have begun a course for beginning a community dialogue on how to improve community engagement. We're off to a strong start
- We've taken a step in the direction of opening up process for better community
- Organized dialogue amount citizens
- We have accomplished the beginning of a positive, constructive dialogue to better improve our community
- Had an open discourse about what we think civic involvement is
- Got to know a few more Alexandrians, which is always a good thing
- Got initial input to frame what the engagement process is
- Civil discourse after certain individuals left
- We shared information about civic engagement and Alexandria's priorities
- We collaborated with community members to generate principles and ideals for future efforts
- A spoonful of trust was gained
- An intro to the process that will be followed
- Team building/engaged us as a group
- Introduced Alexandrians to a process to improve long-term governance
- We met some of our neighbors that we wouldn't have otherwise
- Discovering shared priorities needs to be done on an informed basis - not ignorant, gut feel. The informed participation is suspect in this approach. Need to ensure that science is not lost
- The live stream and chat was a great accomplishment. This should be available for all public meetings and hearings
- We clarified the objectives of this effort. We were introduced to the process we will undertake
- Not sure if too much was accomplished that was any different than any regular city meeting...
- We have seen how passionate persons are about this city. Hopefully we have started to peel the onion of mistrust in processes
- The city leaders have shown that they are receptive to listening to citizen's concerns and will try to resolve them
- Citizens have demonstrated that they are concerned about their neighborhoods and city to the extent that they attended and participated at the meeting
- Took one step toward showing the citizens that you are willing to involve us more and make things better for everyone moving forward.

4. Please list one idea that occurred to you as a result of the exercises and presentation.

- Too noisy to think
- We have to find ways to involve the people who have dismissed or given up on the process of engaging in the Democratic process

- Looking forward to next one
- “Rules of the game” are easily gamed by those who know them and cynicism about the results keeps those with “new info” and knowledge outside of the game
- This is democracy in action
- Our schools need more attention
- I liked the speaker’s idea of community meetings. We should do the same to unite the community more
- We should create a slide for Alexandria like the one presented by Dr. L. that says Alexandria’s crisis is governing
- You need to build a neutral platform, data-based, demographically representative and resonant among all
- Civic associations need to train new members with winnable victories before they go on to the tougher negotiations with Alexandria city staff
- Dialogue works
- Involvement is not about outcome so much as process
- These evaluations should be available online - perhaps give a password to indicate that I was here
- We have far to go but improvement could be possible
- Allow the “work” to have the time. The presentation was nice but took away from our work time. It is a shame that time is such a controller. Conversations take time and the content suffers when held to time
- Collaborating with people that may not have the same ideas or positions, but working together toward a common overarching goal of improving our city
- We can get more input if we do it online at satellite locations across the city
- After a rough start, people can talk and converse respectfully
- Too much stress on form; Not enough on substance
- Don’t do this again; waste of time and money for citizens and city staff and you cannot be trusted
- Circulate or post online the summary sentences answering the 3 questions
- Have similar subgroups based in neighborhood civic associations, condo associations, other city groups, etc.
- Limit “time eaters” (e.g.[redacted]) so the agenda is not railroaded. I feel that her tactics limited the main speaker’s time. Concerns can be addressed before the event
- The agenda was published before today
- Ms. Buttar, our spokesperson, was terrific
- That we change seating arrangements as meeting process so that we get as diverse thoughts and opinions as possible
- What does civic engagement look like in the on-line, digital age?
- Perhaps one different issue at each table. Don’t we have enough feedback overkill on everything else
- Lots of Alexandrians care about engagement
- If we are fully engaged in the process there is no “them” to distinct, we are all “us”
- We can use these principles in the Economic Opportunities Commission
- Setting up a process of engagement is possible and we get examples from other communities
- I’d like to get more involved in my community

- How technology can scale up and down civic engagement (i.e. AmericaSpeaks national effort and how Alexandria could try a similar effort at the neighborhood level)
- Look to who subgroups trust to improve relationships
- Trust is so important
- Residents west of 395 and north of seminary road might need to organize or else be better organized
- That you already have decided what to do/video seemed like a cheerleading
- Totally void scientific approach. The inferred participation is not doable within the video format. A more scientific approach is highly desirable. We need to have a review with scientific literature on this subject.
- Holding multiple community forums, at the same time, across Alexandria
- Perhaps a workshop for residents in how to get city government engaged in a dialog with the community
- I suggest we start table exercises as soon as possible and make them frequent across the course of the meeting. My table barely broke the ice in the limited time available.
- We need our elected officials to be more intimately involved in this process
- Take a little time to ask if persons have been involved in similar processes of engagement and how did those processes end up, if they made progress.
- The focus by the mayor and city council to date has been one of promoting economic growth with quality of life being secondary in many cases. We need a balance between the two areas; there limits to the benefits of economic growth, such as relegating citizens' interests secondary to business development.
- That statement is a little too general for me to be able to understand what you are looking for.
- I enjoyed being able to meet City staff and elected officials face to face and meet some of the other people who live in Alexandria.