

Environmental Policy Commission Proposed Environmental Action Plan Updates Café 2018

Topic: Land Use & Open Space – EAP Usage in City Decisions and Actions

Accountable Departments: Planning & Zoning; Transportation & Environmental Services; Recreation, Parks and Cultural Activities; Department of Project Implementation, et al as applicable

Goal: EAP goals will be understood and integrated across City departments to guide the policy, decision making processes and public and private development applications and project reviews.

Target: By 2020, ensure that City staff consistently apply EAP goals and principles into projects and plans, including achieving environmental sustainability, natural environment preservation and restoration during the review processes and during other activities that may have environmental impacts.

Short Term Actions:

1. By 2019, review and revise current P&Z, T&ES, RPCA, DPI, and other applicable City department's plans, policies, practices, and performance measures to assess how and better incorporate EAP principles and actions to ensure that requirements and goals are consistently implemented in a manner that maximizes environmental benefits and minimizes negative environmental impacts.
 - Such issues include, but are not limited to, open space provided at or above required amounts; preserving natural areas, existing grades and existing native trees plantings to the extent practicable; provides minimum 40% native tree canopy coverage on site to the extent practicable and/or at increased ratios off-site as a means of mitigation; requires native plantings and promotes pollinator protection; requires that new sidewalks and vehicular drives be constructed of permeable pavers and/or stone; minimizes light pollution through shielded, low-temperature lighting and incorporates Lights Out conditions and/or regulations; maximizes density in appropriate locations within walking distance to Metrorail Stations; etc.
2. By 2019, City staff incorporates EAP and environmental best practices measures review into each CIP project and development project review and provides a summary in each report similar to zoning requirement tables detailing how the project will meet or exceed EAP goals and measures, with the summaries published annually.
3. By 2019, ensure that:
 - a. EAP goals are incorporated into all department strategic and business plans and work programs; and
 - b. All relevant city commissions designate a representative who will ensure that the EAP is used as a tool to guide commission decisions.
4. By 2020, the City will annually publish a status report that will highlight the status in achieving EAP goals, those met and those that have yet to be met.

Implementation and Assessment: High. The city already enforces many aspects of the EAP, but does not require achievement at the levels prescribed in the EAP. Providing summary reports should be relatively straightforward to show yearly progress towards EAP goals, and already partially being conducted, but not consistently in a “Greenventory” report.

Justification:

1. The original EAP was designed as a tool to be used to guide all city departments towards being more eco-friendly and sustainable.
2. Private development and City projects are being constructed that do not capitalize on opportunities to maximize environmental benefits and/or harm the environment unnecessarily.
3. Designating one member per commission would help to ensure that decision-making bodies are knowledgeable of the EAP and use it to guide decisions, recommendations, and approvals.

Market Context:

1. Making Alexandria as green, eco-friendly and environmentally sustainable as possible will enhance the City’s desirability and residents’ Quality of Life, health and welfare.
2. The District of Columbia publishes a yearly update to Sustainable DC highlighting goals met and progress towards larger goals. This keeps residents up to date on what the District is doing. In addition Sustainable DC sends out a monthly newsletter highlighting activities and ways that citizens can be involved. It is a very successful program with volunteers in all eight wards.

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Accountable City Departments: Planning & Zoning; RPCA; OHA; TES; Other City Commissions including Parks & Recreation, Beautification, etc.

Goal: Improve the environmental quality of open space by increasing biodiversity, reducing impervious surfaces and incorporating innovative design strategies.

Target: Alexandria will maintain a high-quality publicly accessible open space ratio of at least 7.3 acres per 1000 residents¹ and require consistent and meaningful open space on private development.

Short Term Actions:

1. Protect and add open space through acquisition, preservation and conservation as prescribed in the Open Space Master Plan adopted in 2017 and, by 2025, evaluate increasing the target to 7.5 per 1000 residents. (RPCA)
2. Enforce existing open space acreage commitments in Small Area Plans (apprx. 293 acres).
3. By 2023, increase by 50 percent the number of acres of natural lands that are actively managed, including invasive species control and restoration. (RPCA)
4. By 2021, require consistent and meaningful open space on private development by requiring open space be provided at ground level, vegetated with native plants including large shade trees, no more than 20% impervious surfaces, implementing a framework for developer contributions to off-site open space, and consistency of open space requirements across similar zones. (P&Z)

Implementation Assessment: The City's ability to implement these actions is HIGH since the City has full budgetary and policy control. Securing viable partnerships from third-party funding and organizational sources such as the Northern Virginia Conservation Trust will be paramount. In anticipation of forecasted 2030 population increases that will challenge the ability of the City to maintain a 7.3 per 1,000 ratio, by 2025 the City should re-evaluate appropriate metrics that continue to provide high-quality open space across all categories of use.²

¹ The ratio, set in the 2002 Open Space Plan and re-committed to in the 2017 Open Space Plan Update, was based on 9322 acres of public open space and a population of 128,283 persons divided by 1,000.

² See, [2017 Open Space Plan Update](#), pg. 9: "Adding several hundred acres of new protected open space every decade is not sustainable. At some point, and likely sooner than later, the City's growing population and the City's fixed geographic boundaries will collide, making it impossible to continue to meet this singular metric. In anticipation of that time, the City must consider a different metric to measure its success in protecting and enhancing its open space resources. As the City's population grows, it is worth revisiting the use of a straight ratio to measure success in the provision of protected open space. Other jurisdictions break out types of use, some using the term 'maintained' for areas that accommodate more active uses such as athletic facilities or playgrounds versus more natural areas that include trails and undeveloped open space. Other jurisdictions are moving away from the use of a single ratio of acres of land per 1,000 residents. Instead, they are using tools such as GIS to measure metrics such as proximity of open space to residents throughout the jurisdiction, or identifying barriers that might prevent easy access to open space such as major highways or rail tracks. Other ways to evaluate include

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Justification:

1. *The City has already publicly committed to 7.3 per 1,000 target.* Following the 2003 Open Space Plan, the City successfully achieved—and exceeded—its target of 100 acres. However, once that target was met the City did not articulate a new acreage goal and is at risk of falling behind relative to population growth and increasing demand.
2. *Current Small Area Plans provide for 7.3/1,000.* The City of Alexandria is currently very dependent on the public open space planned for and committed in its Small Area Plans—approximately 193 acres—if the 7.3 acres per 1,000 residents is to be maintained. Even with these additional acres, there will soon be a time where the goal of 7.3 acres is unattainable. Maintaining the acreage promised in the Small Area Plans is vital. If the City lets the promised acreage slip, the year that the 7.3/1,000 ratio becomes unattainable could be as soon as 2025.³

Market Context:

- The City has long recognized the value of open space and detailed the benefits of open space in its 2003 Open Space Plan and subsequent updates.⁴ Professionals and practitioners are recognizing, however, that the quality of open space is as critical as the quantity. As the City's population grows, it will need to ensure that the quality of open space matches the needs of its citizens and Eco-City goals (e.g., sufficient passive recreation areas, high-quality wildlife and plant habitat, impervious surfaces, etc.)
- As detailed in the Open Space Plan 2017 Update, Alexandria's combination of high-density in a finite and reality compact area is somewhat unique. The 2017 Update Appendix 4 lists several comparables.⁵

tracking the amount of active protected open space acres and the amount of passive protected open space or the amount of impervious surfaces.”

³ See, Open Space Plan Update 2017, pages 9-14.

<https://www.alexandriava.gov/uploadedFiles/recreation/parks/021017x%20Alex%20OS%202017%20Implem%20Strat%20Exec%20Sum%20Reduced%20Size.pdf>

⁴ <https://www.alexandriava.gov/uploadedFiles/recreation/parks/OpenSpacePlan.pdf>

⁵ https://www.alexandriava.gov/uploadedFiles/recreation/parks/OSPIS_Appendix_4.pdf

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Topic/s: Land Use & Open Space

Accountable City Departments: RPCA; Planning & Zoning; TES; other City Commissions including Parks & Recreation, Beautification, etc.

Goal: Alexandria's Urban Forest Canopy Coverage is healthy, diverse and targeted to specific land uses and natural features thereby providing broad environmental and social benefits such as improved air quality, enhanced property values, public health benefits, and vibrant public spaces.

Target: By 2020, average overall tree canopy is a minimum of 40%.

Short Term Actions:

1. By 2019, update and coordinate Urban Forestry Master Plan, Environmental Sustainability and Management System, and Landscape Guidelines to support increased tree preservation, expansion, and native species. (RPCA (primary), TES, P&Z)
2. By 2019, prioritize city advocacy for state legislation that would enable the City to increase tree protection, preservation, and expansion. Consider partnering with neighboring jurisdictions to provide stronger lobbying presence in Richmond. (P&Z, RPCA)
3. By 2020, require five years of on-site maintenance for new plantings on development projects and update the contribution fee paid to the Living Landscape Fund for sites that are unable to meet the required amount of tree canopy cover. (P&Z, RPCA)
4. Review the City's current tree canopy coverage and update strategies to achieve the target including: (RPCA, P&Z)
 - (a) By 2020, complete an analysis of tree preservation and increased tree canopy coverage opportunities in the Zoning Ordinance for lots with new single and two-family dwellings.
 - (b) By 2022, through collaboration with non-governmental organizations and other partners the City will facilitate, via technical assistance, coordination, and incentives, every homeowner the voluntary opportunity to consider planting a least one tree.

Implementation Assessment: The City's ability to implement actions 1, 3 and 4 is HIGH since the City has full budgetary and policy control. The City's ability to implement 2 is MODERATE since it will require concurrence from the state legislature. However, the City maintains full control to prioritize this with the state legislature. The primary constraint for 4(b) would be budgetary (e.g. increasing the tree planting, tree maintenance budget) and securing viable partnerships from third-party funding and organizational sources.

Justification:

1. *The City has already publicly committed to a 40% target.* While the 40% target has existed for at least a decade, current coverage is stalled at approximately 35%. New

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and improved short-term actions are necessary for the City to achieve this long-standing goal and once the target is achieved, to prevent backsliding.

2. *An average 40% canopy is the absolute minimum target needed based on latest research and science from the U.S. Forest Service, American Forests and hundreds of peer reviewed academic journals and NGOs.*
3. *A healthy, robust tree canopy is consistent with, complementary to, and will further the City's objectives related to addressing climate change; improving public health and reducing obesity, stormwater reductions; energy efficiency; livability indices and real estate values.*
4. *To achieve the committed to targets, the City must encourage tree protection and preservation on private property to the maximum extent.* The City has an important role to play in supporting education and providing technical guidance. As demonstrated by grassroots initiatives such as the NorthRidge Home Owner Association tree planting effort in the fall of 2017, there is grassroots appetite.

Market Context:

- Hundreds of cities across the country have recognized the importance of urban tree canopy and adopted aggressive coverage goals.¹
- As a 34-year Arbor Day Foundation recognized Tree City² and an Eco-city, Alexandria must lead regionally. Locally, Arlington County's tree canopy target of 40% has been achieved. Notably, just a few years ago it was at 43% which underscores the need to be vigilant. Washington, DC has achieved approximately 40%. Based on compiled data, Alexandria is within the medium of other Virginia municipal targets, but as noted above, Alexandria should lead by example.³
- Investing in trees is fiscally prudent. Many studies demonstrate the value of healthy trees.⁴ As one example, the City of Pittsburgh's award-winning tree preservation initiative demonstrated that for every \$1 invested, there was a return of \$2.94.

¹ See, e.g., <https://www.nationalgeographic.com/news-features/urban-tree-canopy/>

² <https://www.arborday.org/programs/treecityusa/directory.cfm>

³ http://gep.frec.vt.edu/va_utc.html

⁴ <https://www.treepittsburgh.org/resource/benefits-of-trees/>