MINUTES - DRAFT
City of Alexandria, Virginia
AD HOC OPEN SPACE STEERING COMMITTEE
Community Meeting – Virtual [1]
Monday, December 13, 2021
7:00 p.m.

Open Space Steering Committee Members

Present:
Kaitlyn Blume, Member at-large
David Brown, Planning Commission Member
Tatiana Gutierrez, Member at-large
Martha Harris, Historic Alexandria Resources Commission Member
Brian McPherson, Park and Recreation Commission Member
Kurt Moser, Northern Virginia Conservation Trust (NVCT) City of Alexandria Board Member,
        and Ad Hoc Open Space Committee Co-Chair
Brandon Pinette, Member at-large
Micheline Smith, At-large member from the development community (Paradigm)
Denise Tennant, Beautification Commission Member, and Co-Chair, Ad Hoc Open Space
        Committee

Excused:
Mike Olex, Environmental Policy Commission Member

Vacancy:
One at-large member from the business community

City Staff

Jack Browand, Acting Deputy Director, Park Planning, Design & Capital Projects Division,
        RPCA
Jeff Farner, Deputy Director, Planning & Zoning (P&Z)
Judy Lo, Acting Principal Planner, Park Planning Division, RPCA
Melanie Mason, Principal Planner, Stormwater Division, Transportation and Environmental
        Services (T&ES)
Ana Vicinanzo, Urban Planner, Park Planning Division

Guests
None

Call to Order

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[1] December 13, 2021 Meeting video posted to:
https://www.alexandriava.gov/recreation/info/default.aspx?id=89491

Co-chair Moser called the meeting to order at 7 p.m.

Administrative

ELECTRONIC MEETING POLICY
Co-Chair Moser read the electronic meeting policy.

Committee Task Updates
 (in Agenda order)

TASK 2 - OVERVIEW AND TIMELINE - Ana Vicinanzo (RPCA)
(Evaluate and recommend methods of pursuing new publicly accessible open space)
> *NOTE: Presentation (Committee tasks and timeline) posted to:*
> *https://www.alexandriava.gov/uploadedFiles/recreation/parks/Open%20Space%20Stee*
> *ring%20Committee%20Meeting%20-%2012.13.2021.pdf*

- Vicinanzo reviewed details and timing for Task 2
- Beth Znidersic, Acting Park Planning Director, will present an overview of the OS budget and acquisition process at the January 2022 meeting.
- Staff's research on this, e.g. creating OS maps with demographic and socioeconomic data to support planning that addresses OS equity, to be presented to Committee when finished.
- Timing –To start in Winter 2021-2022.

TASK 1, ITEM 2 - UPDATE ON PUBLIC OPEN SPACE ZONE TEXT AMENDMENT -
Ana Vicinanzo (RPCA)
- Vicinanzo reviewed the order in which tasks will be done to support developing and finalizing a proposed amendment to the Public Open Space Zone Text. Significant community engagement prior to finalizing the proposed text amendment update is expected to take about four months.
- *Public engagement* – Public engagement will be extensive and will include, for example, the Park and Recreation Commission, Waterfront Commission, the Alexandria Beautification Commission and the Alexandria Federation of Civic Associations, plus a public survey. When the proposed text is finalized it will be presented to the Planning Commission and then Council for review and action.
- *Timing* –RPCA and Planning and Zoning will be coordinating on the timeline, expected to take about 9-12 months.

Presentation and Discussion:

SMALL AREA PLANNING and OPEN SPACE - Jeff Farner, (P&Z)

NOTE: P&Z presentation poste to
https://www.alexandriava.gov/uploadedFiles/recreation/parks/open%20space%20com%20final%2011-12-21.pdf

Highlights:
- *Small Area Plan (SAP) process* was reviewed
- *1992 Master Plan* – The overall City Master Plan offers a long-term vision for the City. Small Area Plans (SAPs), a subset of the Master Plan, offer visions for neighborhoods.
- *Three recent SAPs were reviewed as examples of the process and issues considered as SAPs are developed:*
  - **Arlandria**;
  - **Landmark Mall**; and
  - **Old Town North/ Hilco site (Hilco/PRGS)**–
    - (*Note*: The former Potomac River Generating Station (PRGS) site is now owned and being redeveloped by Hilco Redevelopment Partners.) [2]
- **Every SAP responds to specific neighborhood conditions using current and projected data.** E.g., Arlandria SAP, covering an area lacking open space, recommends a network of more walkable neighborhood parks to provide smaller spaces that will let the community's large number of young children and families avoid traffic when accessing them.
- **Metrics - What metrics should be used to evaluate potential OS available for acquisition?** Relying only on Open Space ratio does not give a full picture of a site's potential utility.
- **Context** –
  - What OS is there today? What is needed? Are there other open spaces near the potential OS site now?
  - What will be in the area as it develops over time?
  - For denser areas, how to create open space that includes walkable access routes that are safe and attractive?
- **Equity**–
  - Ensuring open spaces are accessible to everyone; to ensure publicly accessible open space in a private development area is not designed to discourage public use by making it look private?
- **Sustainability**
- **Co-use, when is it appropriate? –** e.g. storm water spaces as OS?
- **Indoor spaces –** How to factor them into OS planning?
- **Usability**

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[2] Hilco redevelopment site's information is posted on City website at:
https://www.alexandriava.gov/uploadedFiles/recreation/parks/open%20space%20com%20final%2011-12-21.pdf

- **Visual and physical access**, recognizing that visual access also contributes to an OS experience. Steep slopes in a public open space do not negate its value. It could preserve the tree canopy, be interesting visually and include a pollinator garden creates an area suitable for birding.
- **OS importance to a neighborhood**
  - The importance of publicly accessible open space to a community, e.g. the western end of the City would like a Market Square type of open space in the Landmark redevelopment.
- Inova Hospital agreed to City's suggestion that an open space wellness area be included outside the hospital as consistent with the mission of the hospital.
- **Connectivity –**
  - Is there the potential for creating a network of connected open spaces?
- **How to avoid privatized publicly accessible open space – the border between public and private open space?**
  - Location - If adjacent to private OS is it at risk for becoming "privatized public OS?
  - *Example:* The Waterfront SAP specifically recognized the problem of developers using design to "privatize" publicly accessible waterfront OS and included guidelines to prevent it.
- **Indoor Public Spaces**
  - How to factor them in when deciding upon potential open space sites requirements.
  - Indoor space is not traditional open space – but can augment community spaces available for activities and be an important amenity.
- **Multi-Use Public Open Space**
  - *Stormwater* - When is it appropriate to include a stormwater management space as part of an area's open space?
- **Reminder to Committee when creating guidance -** When providing guidance on OS goals remember that whenever a "minimum" goal is set it realistically is regarded as maximum by developers.

<u>**Committee Discussion**</u>   **- Issues and concerns highlighted:**

- **ISSUE: AVOID EXCESSIVE SPECIFICITY –** Concern raised that Committee guidance re: how to evaluate and incorporate potential public OS should not be overly specific. Each situation is unique and one size won't fit all situations.
  - A: Staff is looking for Committee guidance, not specific guidelines.

- **ISSUE: DESIGN - THE NEED FOR SPECIFICITY**
  - Guidance for developers should have greater specificity - without being excessive – to help applicants when they are planning designs for a new development.
  - City should make its goals and expectations clear to developers up front.

- **ISSUE: INDOOR PUBLIC SPACE OPPORTUNITIES** – How and whether to factor them in when considering guidance for SAP open space goals?
  - Is indoor space open space or public space?
  - Should it be counted as open space even though it is not outdoor space?
  - Including indoor space in open space planning seems contrary to what the Committee has been discussing.
  - If indoor space is considered as part of SAP guidance for OS would this reduce the likelihood of meeting public OS goals in SAPs?
    - A: The City considers indoor space as a way to increase available community space when opportunities for public open space are limited.
  - What type of access and hours should be required?
  - How to address owner liability for public indoor spaces?
    - A: City negotiates an agreement on maintenance and liability responsibilities with the owner.)

- **ISSUE: TRENDLINES in OPEN SPACE ACREAGE in SAPs -** What are the trend lines for open space over time? Is open space acreage tied to SAP approvals? What are the acreage goals in each SAP?

- **ISSUE: VALUING VISUAL ACCESSIBILITY/VIEWSHEDS**
  - How should OS guidance factor in that every square foot of OS does not need to be physically accessible?
  - Sometimes OS that is only visually accessible, e.g. a view of a lake, a woods, may add more value to the experience of nearby OS than physical access.

Follow Up - How to create usable guidance for how to factor in the value of visual OS access?

- **ISSUE: APPLYING OS PRINCIPLES TO IMPLEMENTATION DURING IMPLEMENTATION (Ex: Hilco/PRGS)**
  - How to ensure and track that OS recommendations in a Small Area Plan are implemented as the area is developed over time?
  - **Ex: Hilco's proposed OS acreage**
    - How does it compare to the Old Town North SAP recommendation for the site?
    - Is Hilco counting sidewalks as open space? *Note:* Committee has raised concerns about sidewalks being counted in Open Space acreage.

- **ISSUE: GUIDELINES NEEDED TO DETER DE FACTO PRIVATIZATION OF PUBLICLY ACCESSIBLE OPEN SPACE** (e.g. through design, appropriate location, etc.)

- **ISSUE: CONSIDER UPDATING THE 1992 MASTER PLAN -** COVID-19 has changed residents' daily commuting habits, increasing demand for OS. City should consider updating the Master Plan to reflect residents' changed habits

- **ISSUE: PRESERVING EXISTING OPEN SPACE in SAPs -** SAPs should prioritize keeping existing open space
  - Should guidelines be proposed that recommend new developments should preserve open space on private property?

FOLLOW UP:
- **Hilco/PRGS redevelopment site** - How does Hilco's current open space acreage for the site compare to the Old Town North SAP's Open Space guidelines? (See footnote for link to OTN SAP) [3]
- **Visual accessibility -**How to create usable guidance that defines how to factor in the value of visual OS access?
- **Trend line in open space acreage for redevelopments?**
  - How do the OS acreage goals included in SAPs compare to actual acreage as parcels are developed? What are the trend lines?
- **Multi-use spaces** – Ex: When is it appropriate to include storm water management space as open space?

PUBLIC COMMENTS – None

ADJOURNMENT - Meeting adjourned at 8:20 p.m.

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[3] Old Town North SAP posted at:
https://media.alexandriava.gov/docs-archives/planning/info/masterplan/city=master=plan=map/oldtownnorthsapcurrent.pdf