

MINUTES

**City of Alexandria, Virginia
OPEN SPACE STEERING COMMITTEE
Community Meeting – Virtual ¹
January 18, 2022
7:00 p.m.**

Open Space Steering Committee Members

Present:

Kaitlyn Blume, Member at-large
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)
Mike Olex, Environmental Policy Commission Member
Brandon Pinette, Member at-large
Micheline Smith, One at-large member from the development community (Paradigm)
Denise Tennant, Beautification Commission Member

Vacancy:

One at-large member from the business community

Absent:

David Brown, Planning Commission Member

City Staff

Ellen Eggerton, Sustainability Coordinator, T&ES
Nathan Imm, Principal Planner, Planning & Zoning
Judy Lo, Acting Principal Planner, Park Planning Division, RPCA
Melanie Mason, Principal Planner, Stormwater Management Division, T&ES
Ana Vicinanza, Urban Planner III, Park Planning, RPCA
Bethany Znidersic, Acting Division Chief, RPCA

Guests

Aaron Bethencourt, Planning Associate, RPCA

Call to Order

¹ January 18, 2022 Steering Comm. Meeting video is posted at
https://alexandria.granicus.com/ViewPublisher.php?view_id=29&coa_view_id=29&coa_clip_id=5337

Denise Tennant called the virtual meeting to order at 7:00 p.m. She read a prepared statement that cites the City policy and legal authority governing the use of virtual meetings during the COVID-19 Pandemic emergency and provides information on how the public can access and participate in this virtual meeting.

Public comment is received at the end of the meeting with individual comments limited to no more than three (3) minutes per person.

The meeting's focus was to discuss committee task updates regarding methods of pursuing open space, the Open Space Fund, and city acquisition criteria.

***Presentation PPTs are posted to:
<https://media.alexandriava.gov/docs-archives/recreation/parks/open-space-steering-committee-meeting---1.18.2022.pdf>***

Presentation details are posted online at the above link. Highlights included:

AGENDA ITEM 1: Administrative - Ana (RPCA)

- **Review of DRAFT November and December Open Space Meeting minutes** – Draft meeting minutes were sent out and should be reviewed and approved by the committee. Additional draft meeting minutes will be sent out as they are completed. Any comments should be sent to Ana and then forwarded to the consultant.

AGENDA ITEM 2: Methods for Pursuing Open Space – Ana & Beth (RPCA)

- **Task 2: Evaluate and recommend methods of pursuing new publicly accessible open space.**
 - 1. Develop criteria for considering opportunities for open space acquisition through the Open Space Fund (such as connectivity, walkability to neighborhood needs, access to water, etc.)
 - 2. Develop minimum publicly accessible open space criteria for small area plans based on current and future demographic needs and neighborhood characteristics.
 - 3. Evaluate the Open Space Ratio and/or other targets based on national standards and benchmarks for localities with similar densities.

- Subtask 1 and 2 will be reviewed tonight, while subtask 3 will be reviewed next month.

- **Opportunities for acquiring new open space** – The four areas discussed for opportunities to acquire new open space include through The Small Area Plans (presented December 2021), City acquisition through the Open Space Fund (Task 2.1) or the purchasing of land, Development planning (deed land, developing and deeding and Public Access Easements (Task 2.2)), and through work with the Northern Virginia Conservation Trust.

- **Challenges and Opportunities –**

Method	Ownership	Opportunities/Constraints
•Purchasing land with open space funds	•City	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> •City owns, maintains and controls land •Land is protected through Code that established the Open Space Fund •There may be multiple funding sources; dependent on City funding •Landowner may not be willing to sell property •Resource Protection Areas (RPA's) are an opportunity since development is restricted
•Development planning: Deeding land to the City	•City	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> •Land is dedicated to the City, typically as an approval of development conditions and Small Area Plan recommendation •Land dedications may include improvements •City responsible for design and construction as applicable
•Development planning: Public Access Easements	•Private	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> •Design of open space must meet both public/private goals •Public Access Easements formalize and guarantee public use •May not be protected in perpetuity when land use changes •Space is maintained/operated by owner

- **Four case studies of acquisition -**
 - **Shirley Tyler Unity Park** – Shirley Tyler Unity Park was purchased by the City (from Virginia Electric Power Company) using open space funds. The land was remediated by the City and several partnerships with the community develop it in an interim state. The 2018 development costs were funded through \$300,000 of grant funding and \$75,000 in City funds. The 2009 land acquisition costs were \$850,000 of City funds.

- **Polk Avenue Park** – Polk Avenue Park was purchased by the City in 2012 and the land is owned and maintained by the City. The park is managed as a publicly accessible natural area and so few improves were done to the property. The City was able to purchase the property using \$1.5 million provided by the Department of Defense and \$0.4 million from the City’s Open Space fund to mitigate the loss of open space in the West End.
- **Potomac Yard Park (south)** – In 1999, City Council approved the Potomac Green / Potomac Yard Small Area Plan, which allowed for the area to be designed, developed and then deeded over to the City. The design and development were completed by private entities, while the maintenance is the City’s responsibility in perpetuity through the deeding process. The 2013 construction costs were estimated at \$12M.
- **John Carlyle Square** – John Carlyle Square is privately owned and maintained by the Carlyle Community Council, with public access through a public access easement. In 2000, the City approved the Carlyle Coordinated Development District which included the development and public access easement for John Carlyle Square.

Questions Addressed:

- **Q:** Who approves events on privately owned land, such as John Carlyle Square? **A:** In this case, the Carlyle Community Council.
- **Q:** In the previous meeting, it was stated that depending on if the land ownership changed, the easement may not last forever. Is that true? With Carlyle Square, are there issues keeping the land maintained? **A:** There are two different types of easements, that run either with the land or with the use. If the use changes, the easements may not last forever. As far as with maintenance, there are complexities per site and depending on funding available as budgets change. City and private entities both deal with these challenges.
- **Q:** Can you remind the group how money goes into the open space fund? How much do we have now and do the funds for the development come out of the open space fund as well? **A:** These questions should be answered in the next section.
- **Q:** Do you find particular acquisition methods are more successful or preferred over the others? Is there any difference in extended use? **A:** There are benefits and drawbacks to each of the methods, which were discussed previously by Ana. The question to asked of this committee is

what is seen as the future of acquiring open space and weighing some of those benefits and drawbacks. Some of the figures comparing the methodologies on usability will need to be investigated more extensively.

- **Q:** Are there opportunities for people to donate land to the City? **A:** I believe it would go through the same acquisition process as purchasing land.

AGENDA ITEM 3: Open Space Fund – Beth (RPCA)

- **History of the Open Space Fund** – The history of the Open Space Fund from creation, changes in funding, and current uses of the fund. Beginning in 2001, matching seed money was approved through the Capital Improvement Program (CIP) to fund the study for the Open Space Fund and to fund the next several years to match with grants to start purchasing public open space. Currently, acquisition is funded through the General Fund (so funded through cash capital and bonds) in the CIP. The funding for the Open Space Fund has greatly fluctuated. In 2001, it was funded at about \$200k / year. Currently, the funding is going up and down based on the given year in the 10 year CIP, but it is funded at \$10 million over the 10 year period.
- **Approved Open Space CIP Budget** – The 10 year CIP budget (FY 2021 – FY 2030) includes significant changes to address projected revenue shortfalls, including \$24M reduced from the previous years' appropriations and \$140.6M removed from the FY 2021 CIP. CIP funding is reviewed each budget cycle as part of the Capital Improvement Program. The City Manager's Proposed Capital Improvement Program is released in February each year.
- **Expenditures since 2004** – The bulk of the Open Space fund expenditures is used for land acquisition.

Questions Addressed:

- **Q:** How are maintenance costs addressed in the Open Space fund, such as at Holmes Run? **A:** Maintenance costs come out of the operating budget (routine maintenance) and through the CIP (but would come out of a separate project. The Open Space funds addresses acquisition and initial development.
- **Q:** With the \$10M of the Open Space fund, is there only a small window to use it because if it is not used, it could go to something else? **A:** Funds per year roll over into the next year in the Capital Improvement Program.

- **Q:** What is the total square footage of land acquisitions since 2004? **A:** 454,815 sq ft.

AGENDA ITEM 4: City Acquisition Criteria – Ana & Judy (RPCA)

- **2003 Open Space Plan Acquisition Criteria** – The 2003 Open Space Plan outlined twelve criteria necessary for the City to evaluate when purchasing land. The Open Space nomination form was created through public engagement, which a series of questions that are related to the twelve acquisition criteria.

AGENDA ITEM 5: Discussion on Updates to Acquisition Criteria

- **Questions posed to the group regarding the Acquisition Criteria:**
 - Are there criteria that should be removed?
 - Are there criteria that should be modified?
 - Are there new criteria that should be included?

Discussion Highlights –

- **Q:** Should the criteria additionally address the costs of remediating land and converting it into usable open space? **A:** That is a good point to denote “liabilities” to the City, as one of the criteria.
- **Q:** At this point of time, do you have a que of proposals to sell land as open space? **A:** The first Open Space Steering Committee did come up with an initial list of value open space areas the City should consider acquiring or protecting in the future. I do not think we have updated that list of properties in several years.
- **Wildlife corridors** – On the acquisition criteria, there is no mention of wildlife corridors for the purpose of wildlife safely moving or migrating.
- **Use of open space** – The criteria doesn’t denote the use of open space, such as active and passive space, and how does it address the needs of the particular area.
- **Quality of open space** – The criteria also does not address the quality of the open space.
- **Q:** Does the acquisition criteria address equity issues? Are there criteria that are more important than others when a property is being looked at? **A:** A formal weighing system has not been developed, but it is a potential to identify the larger goals.

- **Request** - Update list of targeted open space acquisition
- **Heat islands** – The criteria does not address areas of heat island effect or climate change / sustainability matters of the “desert” areas.

AGENDA ITEM 6: Next Steps

- Next meeting will revisit the discussion on the acquisition criteria.
- A heat island map will be shared next meeting.
- Staff will evaluate updating the 2004 list of prospective open space.
- The zoom link for next meeting will also be sent out as a follow-up for the updated the date.

Public Comments

There were none.

Next Meeting

The next meeting is scheduled for March 3, 2022 at 7pm.

Adjournment

Meeting adjourned at 8:35 p.m.