



Alexandria West Community Planning
Meeting 8 Questions and Answers – Online
Monday, March 4, 2024

Please Note: All meeting materials, including the webinar video recording, interpreted recordings, and Q&A, are available on the project website at alexandriava.gov/AlexandriaWest

All questions in Q+A were answered live.

Urban Design/Land Use

- 1. In Area 2, within the 150' building height area, will the affordable housing option be added to the 150' feet height or will it be added to the width? If height, how high can the building be within a 150' building height?**

Live answered by Jeff Farner. Bonus height requests are often paired with bonus density requests so it could be a combination of width and height. There are some limitations to using section 7-700 for bonus height. Generally, the maximum additional height that can be requested is 25 feet and it would require approvals from the Planning Commission and City Council. In addition, anything greater than 85 feet would necessitate a different construction type which is substantially more expensive. Additionally, parking is a challenge/limitation.

- 2. Does the planning include light pollution and noise pollution mitigation strategies?**

Live answered by Jeff Farner. The Plan will address high-level elements. The development review process will address things like noise.

All new buildings are subject to the existing Green Building Policy and any updates to the Green Building Policy.

Housing Affordability

- 3. Why is only 10% of development being allocated for affordable housing? This number seems quite low considering the need of the community. Also, will this 10% include supply for deeply affordable housing (i.e. 30% AMI)?**

Live answered by Tamara Jovovic. We appreciate the question and throughout the process we heard and continue to hear about housing affordability. Whether that is cost burden, housing displacement, and residents in condominium communities and high cost of housing. Some of the challenges we face in housing policy are limitations in our legislative authority.

The City has restrictions on what types of policies and regulations we can put in place with respect to what the State has allowed us to do. If the State hasn't authorized us to implement a



certain housing policy, we can encourage and work with developers to reach certain goals but we can't require it.

Our current housing policy at a glance: we have optional zoning tools that create affordable housing, and we also have a housing policy that applies in certain situations, like a rezoning, in which there is additional density. The Plan's proposed 10% policy is building off the City's housing policy that has been adopted and generates rental units at 60% of area median income (AMI) and homeownership units that are generally 70 - 100% of area median income (AMI).

While that generally doesn't meet the needs for cost-burdened households at lower AMI levels, projects like St. James Plaza and the Nexus are examples of public-private partnerships that do serve lower AMI households. These projects are most effective at creating deeper levels of affordability. The Plan does recommend that the City proactively look for opportunities for deeper levels of affordability. We are committed to looking for opportunities through acquisition of land or deepening affordability of existing market affordable stock.

4. There are incentives for affordable housing, but are there none to preserve existing market affordable housing? Alex West has lots of that which seems threatened by this plan.

Live answered by Tamara Jovovic. That is correct that we have important housing communities that provide vital source of housing for the City's workforce. Market affordable housing is housing that has no income restrictions, has no financing from the City or State that makes it affordable, and is affordable because of the age of the building or its location. These are challenges we face with our market affordable housing and the Plan calls for the prioritization of infill development in parking lots or in underutilized commercial areas to increase housing stock without causing displacement of the market affordable housing. The City has great examples where we've worked proactively to preserve properties. The owner has to be willing to do so. On a limited basis, the owner would need to maintain and address capital maintenance issues in exchange for certain provisions. It is a challenging topic in the Plan area and will require continued monitoring and exploration of different opportunities.

5. Can we do things to make bonus height easier to get more affordable housing, like eliminating the public feedback process and replacing it by a board or something similar that developers would be more willing to work with?

Live answered by Jeff Farner and Tamara Jovovic. Answered with Land Use/Urban Design Question #1.

6. Why can't this planning process be one of the avenues to provide deeply affordable housing?

Live answered by Tamara Jovovic. This is particularly challenging for the Office of Housing because through our Landlord-Tenant team we hear about the depth of need. Deeply affordable housing are households at or below 40% AMI (about \$42K – 60K) for a household of four. This income band and lower ones are more difficult to fund because the rents that are required are hard to finance. Our affordable housing projects cost just as much as our market rate projects. The cost of constructing and cost of material are the same. The level of subsidies or external support deeply affordable housing projects are really expensive.



Providing these type of units will require some types of public-private partnerships. Public-private partnerships require a lot of financing sources to come together including City funding. It also involves some type of arrangement or land conveyance. We do have one zoning tool, the Residential Multifamily zone (RMF) that incentivizes units at deeply affordable levels. We have some projects that have demonstrated how effective this particular zone can be at creating units at deeply affordable levels.

Transportation

- 7. Why are there so many proposed BRT stops on Beauregard between Seminary and King, but only one on Beauregard between Seminary and Sanger? Today, there are at least 6 bus stops serving that large group of transit-dependent riders.**

Live answered by Chris Zieman. This is a good question and one we get with bus rapid transit. What we looked at is balancing access for riders and passengers who want to take the bus. The more stops you have, the slower the bus is in general. There is no right answer, the fewer stops we have, the faster they move, and requires more users to walk a little bit longer.

When we chose station locations, we looked at riders and minimizing walking distance to ensure buses are moving quickly. That is why we chose those station locations.

Public Open Space

- 8. What are the City's goals for open space acres per resident, and will the goal be met in West Alexandria based on this plan?**

Live answered by Jose Ayala. Our goal with the Plan is that our open spaces are connected through a significant network. We are looking at the amount of development and what would be the required open space. We want to create a system of parks that are useful and functional. and have the much-needed amenities in the neighborhoods (i.e. playground, court yards, and other types of uses).

- 9. What is your definition of open space? In other city briefings, open space is considered to include parking lots, roofs, easement strips, interior courtyards, and more. None of those would most people think of when they think about what open space is, nor do they make desirable recreation or relaxation space.**

Live answered by Jeff Farner and Jose Ayala. Generally, the benefit of a Small Area Plan is to identify true public parks -- all of the open space you see in the open space diagram is public . The zoning ordinance defines open space on individual parcels as any unobstructed area that is 8'x8' in public and private areas (i.e. interior courtyard).

We want open spaces to be useful and meaningful to the community based on anticipated development. In the future, we will look at types of uses for these open spaces. Parks shown in Parks and Open Space diagram seeks to do that.