

As a Fairlington Villages Board Director, representing Ward VI, I would like to speak for the 5 minutes afforded to Unit Owners Associations.

My name is Melanie Alvord. I serve as the Ward VI Director on the Fairlington Villages Board of Directors. Fairlington Villages Ward VI is composed of City of Alexandria residents.

As detailed in our letter to the Council, Fairlington Villages has historical designation and was originally constructed in the 1940s. It is adjacent to King Street Area 2 of the draft of the AlexWest Small Area Plan.

We do not support the proposed AlexWest SAP for King Street Area 2 and two nearby neighborhoods.

The proposed SAP calls for 100 feet high buildings on King Street Area 2, inclusive of affordable housing these buildings would be 120 to 150 feet. Fairlington Villages sits adjacent, with 2-3 story buildings in a suburban setting.

If this SAP is fully implemented on the four possible redevelopment sites along King Street Area 2, we will have a small version of Crystal City or the New Pentagon City, directly across from us.

During the development process in 2001, we opposed the heights and dimensions of the Alexander and Northampton buildings. Our concerns were not addressed or included, even though we are the adjacent property.

Soon after the Alexander and Northampton were approved, the Halstead Tower, another 16-story building

received approval based on the size of the two buildings that Fairlington Villages had opposed.

These 3 buildings created a small city—overly-large sized buildings in height and dimension built closely together on small parcels of land. Our letter submitted to the Council includes pictures of this small city's effect on our suburban neighborhood.

With the proposed 10 story buildings, 12 or 15 story buildings inclusive of affordable housing, we will now not only have a small city across from us, but the entire south side of King Street Area 2 will be a city-scape setting across from Fairlington Villages properties in the City of Alexandria.

We recognize the need for affordable housing. For Area 2 of King Street, we are asking for 60 feet high buildings, resulting in 85 feet high buildings inclusive of affordable housing.

The second neighborhood of concern is partially adjacent to Fairlington Villages and directly behind King Street Area 2. It currently consists of two 4 story condominiums and 2 high rises within a suburban setting.

If the SAP is fully implemented, it will be a mini-Crystal City with several 175 to 200 feet high rises inclusive of affordable housing—a complete dismantling of the neighborhood's nature and character.

We ask that any new development be built within the pre-existing and long-standing nature and character of the area, namely a suburban setting. Our request is for

new buildings to adhere to a height of 150 feet, inclusive of affordable housing.

The last neighborhood is Bolling Brook, a 4-story condominium community. Due to time limitations please see our letter concerning this area.

In October, Alexandrians in Fairlington Villages submitted letters to the Council stating concerns about proposed building heights and in opposition to having an expanded city setting on the adjacent property and creating a new city setting on the partially adjacent property.

This is in addition to letters sent to the staff in Spring 2023, one of which had over 100 signatures, our residents completing a staff's November 2023 survey requesting that Area 2 remain a suburban setting and compiled comments sent in March 2024 during the development phase of the draft AlexWest SAP.

With the need for affordable housing, it is not a simple either or equation. It is a complex situation. We ask that this complexity be recognized by including established residents' requests.

We ask that our recommendations be included to provide a solution for both affordable housing and building heights, and a setting more in keeping with the nature and character of Fairlington Villages' historic designation.

It is important that I relay our deep disappointment with this process. During the first phase of the AlexWest SAP

we were encouraged to participate—told we are stakeholders and important to this process.

We invited and were pleased to host City staff to speak to Fairlington Villages on three occasions concerning the SAP. While we are grateful to the staff for their time, our concerns were not addressed, and our priorities and recommendations are not included in this SAP despite our ongoing communication throughout this process.

We are pleading with you to address our concerns and work to achieve a compromise. We proposed one. We are hoping you will honor and include our recommendations.

Thank you for allowing me the time to communicate my and my neighbors' grave concerns and the reason for our opposition to the current AlexWest SAP.

MEMORANDUM

November 14, 2024

TO: Hon. Mayor and Members of City Council

FROM: Owen P. Curtis, President, Seminary West Civic Association (SWCA)

RE: Docket Item 10, 11/16/24 Public Hearing: Master Plan Amendment #2024-00003, AlexWest Small Area Plan

This memo presents the comments of the Seminary West Civic Association (SWCA) on the referenced docket item. SWCA has been in operation since 1977, and represents some 600 townhouse and detached single family homes from N Beauregard St. to the City Line, north of Holmes Run to the NVCC Campus. Our neighborhood is a well-blended mix of townhouses and single-family detached homes, with significant tree canopy. For more than 2 years we have met with, provided input to, and feedback on all aspects of the development of this plan, which is replacing one we helped establish in 1992. That plan fairly treated our community in the context of the broader Alex West area. We are sorry that neither the Beauregard SAP nor this proposed version of the Alex West SAP treat our community with fairness, respect, and a sense of preservation of a diverse and desirable place to live and raise families.

We provided staff and the Planning Commission many pages of detailed commentary on this plan, and I will not repeat all that here, but rather simply state a few – tree canopy, open space, setbacks, very tall buildings far too close to SF homes, lack of preservation of market affordable apartments, et al. In large part, this plan was set in stone by the BSAP 12 or more years ago, when the new owners of the Winkler properties came in, asked for, and got what they wanted over the objection of the people who live, work, and shop in Alex West. This plan simply reinforces much of that one.

Most critically, for the future of AlexWest and for saving the taxpayer from hundreds of millions of dollars being misspent, there is one major element of this plan which needs to be stopped, set aside, and seriously and soundly reconsidered – the West End Transitway (WET). It was studied 12 – 16 years ago, and the world has completely changed since then. Yet when we asked for its reconsideration as an integral part of this plan, staff told us that the WET was a GIVEN for this plan, due to being previously studied.

I was a transportation consultant for 50 years, and did a lot of transit and multimodal planning studies. I know things change fast in the urban environment, and ideas need to be replanned as necessary when change happens. All you have to do is consider the situation with our regional transit system, WMATA. The taxpayers have spent more than \$10 billion to build, over forty years, a fixed guideway transit system whose ridership is greatly declining, and whose operating deficits are drastically increasing. Why? **Because fixed**

Seminary West Civic Association

guideway transit CANNOT respond to the change in where, when, and how people need to travel. Metrobus's ridership is not similarly impacted, nor DASH's, as all one needs to do to revise bus transit service is to do the detailed planning and change the routes, the headways, et al ... **UNLESS**, of course, the buses travel on a fixed guideway system like BRT, which is what the WET is proposed to be. It will be a **HUGE** mistake to be fixed.

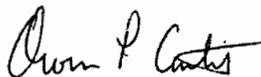
There are virtually no more offices in Mark Center, and not many left in our entire city. People's travel patterns have changed, and the problem with fixed guideway transit is, once hundreds of millions are wasted on what once seemed like a good idea, it cannot be uprooted or moved to serve the evolving patterns of transit ridership. Travel patterns will continue to change and evolve, in manners which plans cannot possibly anticipate. That is why good transit systems update their service plans at least every five years, and monitor usage constantly to provide the insight and data needed to keep up with trends.

We love transit in Seminary West, and we fully support many of the short-term ideas for transit service improvement in Alex West — bus signal priority, et al. But we know that the fixed-route busway - the BRT version of the WET - will not improve transit for us. Instead, the WET, as proposed, will:

- greatly increase walking distance to bus stops along Beauregard for the transit-dependent, mostly immigrant families living in the market affordable apartments in AlexWest. They deserve far better treatment.
- reduce or eliminate service along portions of current DASH routes where the WET will not go, i.e., to the huge number of apartments on the Beauregard corridor from Sanger to Little River Turnpike.
- seriously congest the intersection of Sanger and N. Van Dorn due to the impact of the I-395 overpass which constrains that busy and dangerous location.
- destroy the tree-lined beauty of our city's finest boulevard.
- increase the danger for pedestrians - thousands of school children who attend the (soon to be) four elementary schools along the WET proposed route.

Please remand this plan back to staff with guidance to conduct the right transit service planning effort, devise transit routes and services that can evolve with change over the next few decades, and preserve the character of the main street of our community and of Alex West.

Thank you.



Owen P. Curtis
President
Seminary West Civic Association



[EXTERNAL]AlexWestSmallAreaPlan Docket Item#10

From Ken Notis <civ2kn@gmail.com>

Date Thu 11/14/2024 5:28 PM

To CouncilComment@alexandriava.gov <CouncilComment@alexandriava.gov>

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I am speaking as a resident of the plan areas (3001 Park Center Drive)

I support adoption of the plan, which will help add to housing supply, both committed affordable and market rate, and will improve quality of life in the area in multiple ways. I thank staff for their hard work.

While this is an important step forward, I hope in future it will be possible to further enable more housing near transit facilities in this area. I also ask Council to note how parking minimums serve as an obstacle to new housing in this area, and to consider reform of them in the future.

Ken Notis

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[EXTERNAL] Please approve the Alexandria West SAP (Docket Item 10, 11/16/24)

From Tom VanAntwerp <vanantwerp@gmail.com>

Date Thu 11/14/2024 6:38 PM

To CouncilComment@alexandriava.gov <CouncilComment@alexandriava.gov>

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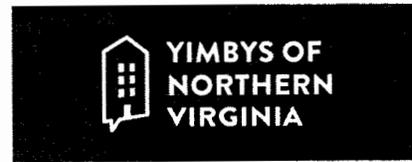
I'm writing to ask the Council to vote in favor of the Alexandria West Small Area Plan. This plan is a good starting point for guiding the future development of the area. Though I would also encourage the Council to approve the 5-year check-in requested by the Planning Commission as well. While I frankly don't think this plan does not go far enough to encourage growth of available and affordable housing (e.g., too short height limits and too much mandated parking), it is better than not passing it.

Thank you,

Tom VanAntwerp,
Resident, Alexandria

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To: Alexandria City Council
From: YIMBYs of Northern Virginia, Alexandria Chapter
Re: Alexandria West Small Area Plan



Mayor Wilson, Vice Mayor Jackson, and members of Council,

We appreciate the hard work staff has put into engaging the community as they develop this vision for the future of Alexandria West. Through consistent community engagement, focusing on vulnerable communities and the needs of both current and future residents, staff have produced a draft plan that will deliver improvements in the Plan Area. We appreciate the attention to multimodal transportation networks, expanded and connected parks, and accessible neighborhood amenities.

We also appreciate the improvements staff have made to the original draft, increasing baseline heights and densities in much of the Plan Area and adding a new form of the “bonus height” provision that allows still more height in return for deeply affordable housing. Planning Commission further improved the Plan by asking for an opportunity to update the Plan in a few years if staff discovers that the Plan has been too restrictive and isn’t seeing the desired development take place.

This improved Plan is a step toward abundant and affordable housing in Alexandria West. Council should make the following minor changes, then approve the Plan as amended by Planning Commission:

- **Require staff reports to document the displacement impacts of failing to build additional housing.** In item 10 of the memorandum, staff has proposed adding a requirement that staff reports will document the displacement impacts of redeveloping existing housing. Should you choose to implement this proposal, we ask you to add a requirement in cases where the proposed redevelopment will build more housing than what currently exists on the site, that staff reports document the short- and long-term displacement impacts of *not* building additional housing. Far too many of our neighbors in Alexandria West are already facing displacement due to rent increases caused by our housing shortage. We cannot continue to only consider potential consequences of taking action, while ignoring the serious consequences of inaction that we are already facing.
- **Acknowledge impacts of parking mandates and recommend changes as needed.** This plan makes an admirable effort to prevent displacement by encouraging development on surface parking lots in the plan area. We worry that this may not be feasible in reality, given the city’s extensive parking mandates which would require expensive new parking structures to be built to not only replace the spaces lost due to development but also accommodate what the city imagines the new structure will also require. Mandating more parking than a builder determines is needed will drive up costs for the Alexandrians who live in these buildings, cost money that could otherwise be directed to subsidizing additional affordable units, or make the project entirely infeasible.

The report makes no comment on the feasibility of its strategy given current mandates, but notes that the plan area will be subject to whatever city parking policy is in place at the time a project is approved. The plan should be more clear about whether its strategy is feasible under current mandates and, if not, make a recommendation for their reform or removal.

- **Add an explanation of why the chosen height limits accomplish the housing goals of the Plan.** While the members of staff who developed the Plan have extensive subject matter expertise in planning, it is not always clear to community members (including volunteer organizations like us) why certain height limits were chosen. The Plan would be stronger if it included a clear explanation of why the Plan's height limits were chosen to accomplish the Plan's goals, with a particular focus on height limits of 35 and 45 feet, and height limits between 100 and 130 feet.

While the Plan is a step toward a more affordable future in Alexandria West, and is worth passing as improved by staff, Planning Commission, and hopefully Council, we believe it still falls short of the transformative action needed to stem the tide of displacement. Many of our neighbors in Alexandria West work hard, but struggle to find a safe and healthy home they can afford. Our neighbors deserve more than a step in the right direction.

We cannot solve our housing affordability crisis unless we legalize truly abundant housing throughout our entire city, including Alexandria West. We seek a Plan that delivers an abundance of committed affordable homes alongside the truly abundant market-rate homes we need to address our housing shortage and bring down costs for everyone. The only way to accomplish this is by maximizing the number of homes built, while providing incentives for a portion of these homes to be set aside as committed affordable units.

Throughout the planning process, we have asked for the following changes. The Plan has certainly moved in the direction of housing abundance, but falls short of the transformation needed to truly achieve it. In addition to the changes requested above, a Plan serious about achieving abundant affordable and market rate homes would also:

- **Increase allowable heights in the 35-foot and 45-foot zones to 60 feet.** Staff's changes to the draft plan include a proposed new mechanism, Tier B, for additional height in exchange for deeply affordable housing. Unfortunately, large portions of the plan area are ineligible for Tier B as well as the existing Section 7-700, or Tier C, because their allowable height is less than 50 feet. **Affordable housing should be legal and feasible to build in all of Alexandria West, not just select parcels.** We can't afford to take any options off the table to build the committed affordable and market-rate homes we need to address our housing crisis. Increasing allowable heights will make desperately needed housing, like the small townhouse development we hope you'll approve on Thursday, legal in all of Alexandria West.
- **Increase allowable heights in the 100-foot, 110-foot, and 130-foot zones to 150 feet, with increased FAR as needed to accommodate taller buildings.** Staff has stated

throughout the planning process that the multifamily buildings most likely to be built in Alexandria West are wood construction buildings maxing out at 85 feet. But if there are instances where market conditions allow for the construction of a taller building, we should legalize as much housing as possible rather than arbitrarily limiting heights.

Increasing allowable heights in the 100+ foot zones to 150 will ensure we legalize as much housing as possible surrounding planned West End Transitway stops. Given the Plan's affordable housing incentives, maximizing the total number of homes built also means maximizing the total number of affordable homes, a critical need in the community. It is our understanding that the new Tier B incentive can apply atop a 150-foot building just as well as it can atop a 100-foot structure. If there are specific sites where setting a height limit less than 150 feet significantly increases the opportunity to maximize affordability, then these decisions should be made based on affordability only, not out of an aesthetic desire for shorter buildings or "compatibility" with other built forms. The largest risk in Alexandria West isn't that we build too much, it's that we don't build enough.

While we don't expect these more sweeping changes to be made at this final step in the planning process, if Council believes a limited additional delay is necessary to align this plan with the goals it sets out to accomplish, then we support that decision. We also hope that staff, Commissioners, and Council who care about alleviating displacement pursue transformative action in future planning processes - especially the Housing Master Plan and future Small Area Plans that address neighborhoods facing less risk of immediate displacement.

About Organization: *YIMBYs (yes in my backyard) of Northern Virginia is a grassroots, all-volunteer organization working to make housing affordable to all by enabling the construction of more homes for more people. Attainable homes close to the amenities of daily life hold the promise of communities that are more affordable, socially connected, economically productive, and sustainable.*

www.yimbysofnova.org

Mayor Wilson, Vice Mayor Jackson, and members of Council,

I'd like to share my thoughts with you as an individual on the Alexandria West plan. I enthusiastically echo everything in the YIMBYs of NoVA letter, which I coauthored with my awesome fellow members of the leadership team. I also want to share with you that my personal stance goes a bit farther than our asks as a team. I would like to see more height and density legalized throughout the entire plan area, including in the 35-foot and 45-foot zones, even if it requires a brief delay to make those changes. Our housing affordability crisis is an emergency, and we must act like it, with a focus first and foremost on the root cause – our housing shortage. It's important for the next 10-15 years in Alexandria West to include more committed affordable units so that residents of aging buildings can move to a safer and more comfortable home if they choose, but at the same time, we don't know what market conditions will occur over the next 15-20 years, and private business owners can only do so much to fix an affordability crisis that was created by our city's extreme zoning laws. We must bear in mind that a market-rate home that is built and occupied is far better for our city than a committed affordable unit that exists only as an unused incentive on paper.

Thank you for your service and dedication to our city,
Phoebe Coy

November 14, 2024



Sent via email

City of Alexandria Mayor Justin Wilson, justin.wilson@alexandriava.gov

City of Alexandria Vice Mayor Amy Jackson, amy.jackson@alexandriava.gov

City of Alexandria Councilman Canek Aguirre, canek.aguirre@alexandriava.gov

City of Alexandria Councilwoman Sarah Bagley, sarah.bagley@alexandriava.gov

City of Alexandria Councilman John Chapman, john.taylor.chapman@alexandriava.gov

City of Alexandria Councilwoman Alyia Gaskins, alyia.gaskins@alexandriava.gov

City of Alexandria Councilman Kirk McPike, kirk.mcpike@alexandriava.gov

Re: AlexWest Small Area Plan

Dear Alexandria Mayor, Vice Mayor, and City Councilmembers,

We, Tenants and Workers United are writing to emphasize that we are not in favor of the small area plan for the West End of Alexandria that was recently approved by the Planning Commission. This plan, as it is written, does not benefit low-income communities of color in the West End. In fact, this plan is likely to result in mass displacement and pushout, and the only plan the city has for this is to help people relocate. Our people do not want the city to facilitate their displacement; our people want the city to help them and their families remain in the communities they call home, at the schools they love, near their friends and neighbors. We need this housing situation to get better; what our community needs is deeply affordable housing.

Time and time again, our community members met to voice their concerns and their needs, and now we see a plan that recognizes those concerns but does not address the needs. You actively provided support for our organization to collect feedback from those most likely to be impacted by this plan. We did just that, and now the city has an opportunity to meaningfully address those concerns, but it is not. Through many meetings, letters, and public comments, our organization has expressed recommendations and concerns from the beginning, and at this point, it seems that all of that has been completely ignored.

We are still concerned that the City is not prepared for the probable displacement that will result from the land use and planning and zoning changes in the West End. Working-class families who reside in the impacted neighborhoods, particularly tenants, continue to suffer from the high cost of rent, landlord-generated arbitrary fees, unsafe housing conditions, and a lack of tenant protections. This Alex West Small Area Plan must maximize the opportunity for new, innovative, and proactive tools and resources that would protect and preserve existing communities, but we now know that this plan will not do that. The following are issues we want to raise regarding the Alex West Small Area Plan:

- **Preserving and creating deeply affordable housing:**
 - While we recognize this is only a land use plan, it still addresses many community topics that will guide the future of the West End. This plan will still have strong impacts on working-class families, and it does not explain how the city will preserve and create deeply committed affordable housing. It mentions focusing on strong partnerships with local property owners, developers, and city, state, and federal agencies to produce deeply affordable housing, but it does not break down that process, and it does not specify whether these partnerships will use proactive tools, policies, or financial investments to support housing. We continue to advocate for a locally funded housing voucher program and an expansion of the guaranteed income program, which will prevent our community members from being forced out of the City while we collectively work on more sustainable, long-term solutions to the housing crisis.
 - Although the plan acknowledges that there is a great need for deeply affordable housing for the West End's working-class tenants, many of whom are people of color and immigrant families, the plan fails to guarantee more deeply affordable housing. Currently, the plan mentions the city's recommended affordability requirements are for housing at 60% AMI, which excludes many of our community members because they earn far less. The plan misses key opportunities to require deeply affordable housing when it recommends significant height and density increases to incentivize the development of parking lots and commercial areas, especially in the Focus Area. We urge you to require a significantly higher percentage of deeply affordable housing among net new housing developments created by rezoning, more than the current proposed requirement of 10%.
 - We are concerned about incentivizing development in areas that already include the majority of rental housing in this area. We would like to see the plan equitably distribute development impact and opportunities throughout the West End.

- **Anti-displacement, neighborhood preservation, and tenant protections:**
 - The plan does not outline anti-displacement measures or explain how low-income communities will be preserved through programs such as a housing voucher program. It does not outline ways to protect West End residents from any development and does not mention any investments in displacement prevention. The current recommendations offer minimal tenant protections. While the city briefly and broadly mentions relocation plans, it does not break down what the city's technique will be. TWU believes the city's priority and vision for working-class families of color living in the West End should be for them to stay in their communities and not be relocated due to gentrification or development. The city's goal should be to keep families in their communities, not help them move.
 - The current recommendations mention little about preserving existing affordable housing. Recommendations could include initiatives such as dedicating city land

and funds to establish land trusts and cooperatives. We would like to see more concrete commitments from the city for housing preservation.

In our most recent discussion with City staff, we were told that most of our concerns outlined here fall under the Housing Master Plan. Once again, community members will have to participate in yet another city-led planning process. Our families have already engaged in the Housing/Zoning For All, the Alex West Small Area Plan, and, soon, the Housing Master Plan.

We understand that the City of Alexandria has to abide by a bureaucratic process, but it is frustrating for our community members – longtime city residents – to continue to engage in city processes and provide their input, only to be told that their input needs to be shared at another time, during another process. This frustration is compounded when residents are already worried about whether or not they will be able to continue living in the city they call ‘home.’

Again, Tenants and Workers United appreciates being given the opportunity to provide feedback during this entire process, and we urge you to heed the call of the working-class families that will be negatively impacted by this plan.

Sincerely,

Nathaly Zelaya
Community Organizer, Tenants and Workers United
nzelaya@tenantsandworkers.org

CC:

The Planning Commission of the City of Alexandria, PlanComm@alexandriava.gov
Evelin Urrutia, Executive Director, Tenants & Workers United, eurrutia@tenantsandworkers.org
Ingris Moran, Lead Organizer, Tenants and Workers United, imoran@tenantsandworkers.org