

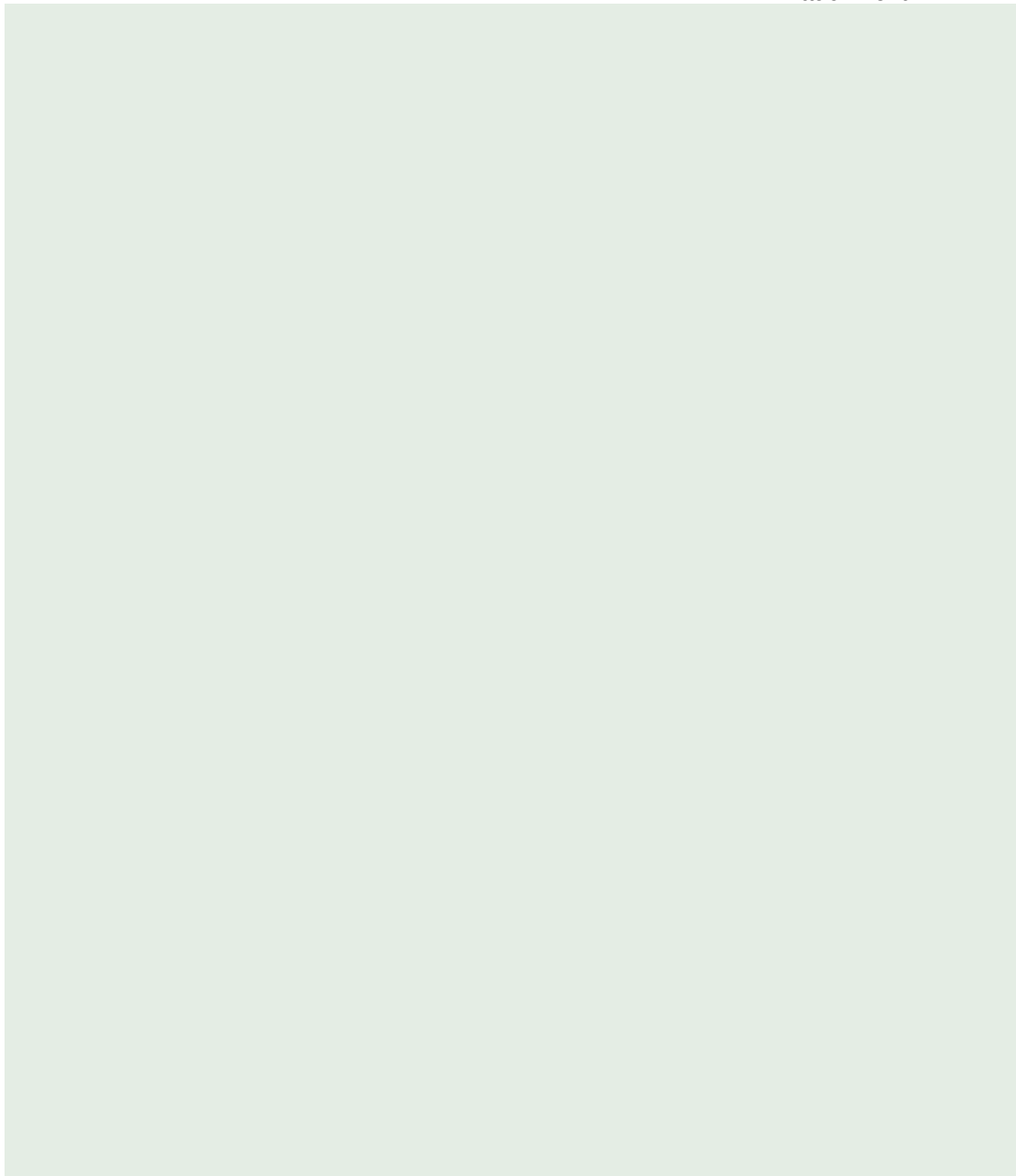
OPEN SPACE MASTER PLAN 2017 UPDATED IMPLEMENTATION STRATEGY

**TECHNICAL APPENDIX 6.
SWOT ANALYSIS**

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Appendix 6. SWOT Analysis

Strengths

Internal

Assets

- The City of Alexandria, with a relatively small footprint at 15 square miles, has made a clear commitment to provide publicly accessible open space for its residents and visitors
- The City has 1241.23 acres of dedicated open space owned by the City as well as regional and national entities such as the Northern Virginia Regional Park Authority and the National Park Service
- The City has 193.71 acres of land designated in Small Area Plans for future open space needs and uses
- The City has 112.43 acres of open space protected by public access easements
- The City has a sophisticated staff that is familiar with various tools for open space preservation and enhancement
- The City has a dedicated budget for open space acquisition, which has been funded in past years
- The City adopted a goal of providing 7.3 acres of open space per 1,000 residents in 2002 which is comparable to communities with a similar population (not density)

Current Practices, Planning Tools and Techniques

- The City is actively involved with other open space managers and owners such as the Northern Virginia Conservation Trust (NVCT), the National Park Service (NPS), and the Northern Virginia Regional Park Authority (NOVA Parks)
- The City has an active public access easement program/policy
- The City has adopted policy and regulations in support of obtaining additional open space acreage, including via future development guided by the City's Small Area Plans, dedicated land and recordation of public access easements
- The City tracks sympathetic easements such as historic easements that protect open space while also protecting the targeted resource
- The City has extensive GIS mapping and data system that is updated frequently

Weaknesses

Internal

- The City's recordation process for public open space easements is not easily tracked or monitored
- The City's use of a single acreage figure per 1,000 residents as the targeted goal for open space acquisition does not recognize the complexity and variety of open space and how it is acquired or held, nor its geographic accessibility and equity to Alexandria's residents
- The City's GIS layer has mistakes and errors that skew the acreage totals
- The City's acre count is derived from two different conflicting sources—differences between acres measured using GIS shape files versus acres as recorded in real estate records—need to identify which is the 'official' measure
- The City's 2014 Open Space Typologies and use categories include inaccurate classifications for some sites and parcels, such as 1500 King which is classified as open space when there really is no open space there; these anomalies of inclusion or exclusion affect the comparison of acres per resident over time, threatening the accuracy of the City's total open space acreage ratio
- The City's use of active and passive recreation in the 2002 plan is confusing; term definitions are unclear and vary between use for planning or maintenance tasks
- The City's Public Open Space (POS) zone does not currently apply to all areas within the Open Space Typology, including Alexandria Public School sites
- Confusion and lack of clarity on standard park terminology, such as active vs. passive use; as there are not nationally accepted definitions for such
- The City's population and geographic size make it challenging to improve its ratio of open space per 1,000 residents, per national benchmarks and research
- The City's planning and approval process for new developments makes it difficult to track some projects as names and addresses may change during the planning approval process
- Documentation of the City's protected open space parcels is managed by different agencies within the City, making coordination of policy and access a complex endeavor
- The City has limited or no available staff to keep the data sets current in table format and GIS mapping
- The City has limited or no available staff to monitor the development approval process, ensuring that Small Area Plan recommendations are adhered to and that any easements or other agreements are officially recorded and documented
- The City has limited staff time to monitor the updates and reviews of the Small Area Plans

Opportunities

External

- The City has numerous public and private cemeteries that contain extensive open space areas, including ecologically important wildlife habitat. Determine how to best conserve and potential to provide or protect public access as partner with entity.
- The City should determine how to partner with owners of non-City owned public or privately held open space; for visual access and potential trail or neighborhood links as appropriate. (Northern Virginia Community College Alexandria, Virginia Theological Seminary and the George Washington Masonic Memorial provide examples)

Internal

Document Acquired Open Space

- The City should require proof of recordation of public access easements prior to the approval and release of the site plan, similarly to the current requirement for stormwater easements.

Map Potential Open Space Resources

- The City should map private school holdings within the City, such as private preschools and private elementary schools, some which have extensive open space on their campus.
- The City should map and evaluate power line and utility corridors throughout the city for potential open space opportunities
- The City should map and evaluate public and private day care centers for several purposes - some have open space on their campus while others may not have easy access to accessible public open space
- The City should map views of its amazing water resources which surround the City: the Potomac River; Cameron Run; and Four Mile Run, and explore tools and techniques to maintain those viewsheds or view lines, expanding the sense of public space and openness
- The City should map areas of open space currently owned and managed by Homeowner Associations and institutions

Research and Document Additional Potential Open Space Resources

- The City should study the potential open space and public space transformations of the city's right-of-ways, looking at programs such as 'road diets,' context sensitive design, pull-outs or bump-outs, pedestrian streets, stormwater infrastructure and aesthetic enhancement

- The City should evaluate the Warwick Pool, currently privately owned which could be targeted for some form of action or protection of its open space
- The City must remain involved with the updates of the City's Small Area Plans which outline many opportunities for increasing open space in the city. While most of the proposed open space is to be publicly accessible, private open space continues to be the norm in multi-family residential developments—should that provision be reconsidered to require additional public access?
- The City should be involved in the discussion on the proposed redevelopment of the ARHA sites in regards to future open space provisions if not already addressed in the City's Small Area Plans (current configuration provides extensive open space for current occupants and neighboring properties)
- The City should pursue its current interest in multi-use efforts—green infrastructure, stormwater, right-of-way management, pocket parks, sidewalk enhancements, median enhancement—can and sometimes also support open space goals
- The City should explore the potential to formalize a form of agreement on public/private access on large properties such as the Episcopal High School or Northern Virginia Community College
- The City should create a working round table and discussion group with other DC Metro area park planners to determine more defensible and consistent regional park and open space standards and measures; there are no standard national standards. Issues arise with other entity's metrics such as the Trust for Public Lands' City Lab metrics which do not include all forms of open space which negatively affects the City's regional and national ranking in its provision of open space. Within the City there are differences in the classification of synthetic turf—will TES allow newer versions to be considered pervious?

Threats

External

- The City does not receive recognition for the entirety of its protected open space acreage due to outside agencies' criteria for inclusion in nationally publicized standards
- The current metrics used to evaluate and rank jurisdictions are punitive to Alexandria as they do not reward communities that are 'thinking out of the box' and attempting to increase the amount of open space via different acquisition and legal mechanisms
- There is no uniform national benchmark or best practice for an open space ratio or metric which is necessary to prove that the current metric (7.3 per 1000) is no longer applicable/feasible (calculation differences—TPL example)
- Many large private properties within the City with large amounts of open space relative to built lands are beginning to intensify and propose additional development on site. These include:
 - Seminary property development proposals
 - Bishop Ireton development proposals
 - NOVA Alexandria campus development proposals
- Neighboring models of new building styles upend traditional approaches to providing schools with associated open space—the example of Fairfax County's Bailey's Elementary School's new campus may serve as a model for urban school grounds and buildings; no open space or at-grade play space is provided; as schools expand and densify, City may lose existing open space such as athletic fields and playgrounds that are open to the public with restricted hours
- Maintaining and delivering promised open space in Small Area Plans
- Protecting existing open space from building encroachments or re-purposing

Internal

- The City's upcoming challenge in retaining and meeting the 7.3 acres of open space per 1,000 residents as population increases
- The City's increasing and higher density development continues to put pressure on the City's existing open space provision per resident, making it more difficult to retain or enhance the ratio of open space to resident - is the single metric of open space ratio of 7.3 acres per 1,000 residents still feasible or appropriate?
- The City of Alexandria cannot annex additional land
- The City's categorization of open space into park typologies and use types can overlap or be indistinct; the current classification system (typology, use type, definitions, etc.) may need revisions
- Currently regulated daycares have no curriculum standard that requires on-site outdoor open space
- Need for better clarity of requirements for residential development provision of private open space and what is allowed or accepted
- Need better criteria to shape outcome from open space contribution funds from commercial development unable to provide open space on site

