

City of Alexandria, Virginia

MEMORANDUM

DATE: MAY 29, 2019

TO: CHAIR MACEK AND MEMBERS OF THE PLANNING COMMISSION
CHAIR KATHPAL AND MEMBERS OF THE ENVIRONMENTAL POLICY COMMISSION
CHAIR ATKINS AND MEMBERS OF THE PARK AND RECREATION COMMISSION

FROM: KARL MORITZ, DIRECTOR, PLANNING & ZONING

SUBJECT: OPEN SPACE IN NEW DEVELOPMENT
JOINT WORK SESSION DISCUSSION AND FEEDBACK

The following memorandum is an addendum to the staff report for Docket Item #7 of the June 4, 2019 hearing - Shared Expectations for Open Space in New Development. A Joint Work Session with the Planning Commission, Park and Recreation Commission (PRC), and Environmental Policy Commission (EPC) was held on May 20, 2019 to discuss proposed Shared Expectations for open space in new development. Due to the timing of the meeting and the submittal of the staff report, the discussion and subsequent alteration of the Shared Expectations were not able to be incorporated into the staff report. The purpose of this memorandum is to summarize the discussion from the Joint Work Session meeting and present a revised version of the Shared Expectation based on that feedback.

JOINT WORK SESSION DISCUSSION*:

Several Commissioners throughout the evening, with general concurrence, noted that the Shared Expectations as initially drafted provided a strong fundamental basis as objectives that should be achieved in open space in new development. The Shared Expectations were described as the cardinal directions, providing a basis for discussion of the quality and tradeoffs related to open space, aligned with the roles.

The balance of quantity and quality of open space was a continual storyline in the discussion. While there was general consensus that a quantity-based open space requirement must be retained, there was an intersecting discussion that quality of open space is of similar importance, to the degree that quality may be considered for a tradeoff for quantity. The integration of quality and

quantity of open space in new development was seen as the overarching goal of the Shared Expectations.

The ratio of at-grade open space to above-grade open space was actively deliberated, at various times during the meeting the following thoughts were raised: the establishment of an incentive or weight to at-grade open space; a means to maintain the required percentage of total open space while shifting to a higher allowance of above-grade space in dense areas; a recognition that maximizing at-grade space in proximity to transit may not be appropriate, and; a desire to maximize roof-top open space in all cases (“shouldn’t waste roofs”). The discussion of this topic concluded that the general direction of the allowance of above-grade with the general ratio and associated flexibility was desired to allow for the neighborhood and site-specific context to determine the appropriate ratio.

In the discussion of the Roles for open space (Shared Expectation A), there was a desire to incorporate more explicit language on the environmental objectives as provided in the Environmental Action Plan chapter on Land Use and Open Space.

Several items were discussed which will be incorporated into considerations through separate processes, such as the Publicly- Accessible Open Space Policy Plan and the Green Building Policy. These discussion items included the ratio of publicly accessible open space to population (acres/1,000 residents), the aggregation of publicly accessible space at the neighborhood scale through Small Area Plans (ex. Potomac Yard’s open space network), and open space contribution guidelines.

**Video of the Joint Work Session is available on the City’s website.*

REVISED & RECOMMENED SHARED EXPECTATIONS:

The revised Shared Expectations are provided below. For a redline version of the Shared Expectations that highlights the changes that have been made based on the Joint Work Session, please refer to the attachment.

I. Introduction

Open space in new development is guided by Citywide policies and plans and the relevant small area plan. Citywide plans, such as the Open Space Master Plan and Landscape Guidelines, and policy documents such as the Environmental Action Plan, provide citywide guidance on expectations for open space in new development. Individual small area plans use those citywide plans and policies to provide more specific guidance for new development within the plan area.

The Shared Expectations created through this process will be utilized to guide the amendment of current practices, policies, and regulations for open space in new development. This may include the creation of guidelines to be utilized in the review of development cases and text amendments to the zoning ordinance, where desired.

The Zoning Ordinance's open space quantity requirements are considered generally correct, but there are opportunities for refinement. Combined with open space quantity requirements in Small Area Plans, the City's open space quantity goals are being met. Future work should look at some refinements, including:

- Whether open space quantity requirements should vary, to any degree, with density.
- Whether similar zones (RB and RM, for example) should have similar open space quantity requirements
- Whether the "8-foot rule" should be amended in historic districts to encourage the retention of small spaces between buildings.
- Whether further definition of the term "open space" may be beneficial.

II. Shared Expectations

A. It is desirable for open space in new development to achieve all four "roles:" form-defining, visual relief, outdoor living, and environmental benefit:

- **Form-defining** means: the open space and building(s) of a new development are designed as a wholistic system where they inform the shapes and volumes of each other.
- **Visual relief** means: the open space provides sufficient distance or setback between buildings within the development or adjacent structures to provide clear separation between masses, light and air, and a sense of spaciousness.
- **Outdoor living** means: the provision of essential resources such as shade or seating, in combination with passive and active recreational activity spaces or features that encourage the animated use of the open space.
- **Environmental benefit** means: the provision of green infrastructure to meet the regulatory requirements and policy goals of the City and State, including but not limited to the following topics: canopy cover; stormwater management and quality; native plantings and invasive species control, and; enhancement of stream valleys.

B. New development has an important role in the provision of public and public-private open space.

- Through the Small Area Plan process, the locations, quantities, and programming for public and public-private open spaces may be established based on community needs and the projected impacts of development in these areas.
- New development projects that are unable to meet their required open space quantity or that cause additional or unusual impacts to the City's park and recreation system will be required to provide contributions (in-kind contributions or funds toward shared public open spaces such as parks) according to criteria and contribution rates that will be established in the Small Area Plan for the area(s) in which the development resides.

C. Private open space is a necessary and positive component of open space in new development projects. Open space for the use of the occupants and visitors of a development serves the needs of the residents, adds to their quality of life, and, when planned in coordination with the surrounding context, can reduce the impact of development on the public park and recreation system.

- D. **Above-grade open space can be a valuable contribution to on-site open space where it is able to fulfill several of the “roles”:**
- Above-grade open space can provide valuable private open space for the occupants of a development. The amount of above-grade open space that contributes toward the required quantity of open space on a new development may vary based on the density of the zone and may average 40-60% of the required open space, but may vary widely by site.
 - Open space that is above a structure but is generally at the level of an adjacent public area via a direct grade-level entrance on at least one side may be considered as on-grade open space.
- E. **Open space should be purposefully integrated into the site design and user services or facilities of the development.**
- The site and building design for new development should integrate the open space, including above-grade open space, into the design composition. This ensures that the open space is a fundamental consideration in the planning and design of the development. The creation of residual spaces that are converted to open space at a later stage in the process, due to unsuitability for other uses, is discouraged.
 - When designing new open space as part of new development, a cohesive vision and design for the open space should be provided to implement open space which clearly demonstrates its intended use.
- F. **Open space in new development should provide a physical and perceptual connection to its neighborhood.** Decisions on the locations and configurations of the open space on a site should be sensitive to the neighborhood, with a goal of providing a strong relationship to the character of the neighborhood. Open space should enhance the character of existing communities by providing strong connections to existing neighborhood and City-wide public open space networks.
- G. **Provide clear distinctions of the intended user group of a space.** The open space design should manifestly communicate whether the space is for the private residents, a mix of private and public, or publicly accessible, and provide clear transitions and boundaries between the different user areas.
- H. **Maximize the benefit of unique physical features and green infrastructure in the planning and programming of the open space.** Site requirements and existing features such as stormwater infrastructure, steep slopes, existing notable trees, and intermittent streams should be incorporated into the open space planning for the site from an early concept stage in order to positively integrate and protect these features.
- I. **Maximize green space.** Where fitting with the use and programming of the open space, new development should seek to maximize the amount of green space over paved or impervious space.

- J. **Increase the deterrence of crime through environmental design.** Use design strategies to create opens spaces that deter offenders and build a sense of community among residents so that residents feel empowered to utilize open space and reduce opportunities for crime.

STAFF:

Karl Moritz, Director, Planning and Zoning
James Spengler, Director; Department Recreation, Parks & Cultural Activities
Yon Lambert, Director, Transportation & Environmental Services
Robert Kerns, AICP, Development Division Chief, Planning and Zoning
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Dana Wedeles, Principal Planner, Park Planning, Design, Capital Development
Ellen Eggerton, Sustainability Coordinator, Office of Environmental Quality
Sara Brandt-Vorel, Planner III, Planning and Zoning
Anna Franco, Planner II, Planning and Zoning

ATTACHMENTS:

1. Revised Shared Expectations (with markup).

Open Space in New Development Shared Expectations

I. Introduction

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