



Shared Expectations for Open Space in New Development

Purpose of Application	General Data	
Consideration of recommendations for shared expectations for open space in new development.	Planning Commission Hearing:	June 4, 2018
	City Council Legislative Meeting:	October 22, 2019
Applicant:		
City of Alexandria Staff: Departments of Planning & Zoning, Recreation, Parks, and Cultural Activities, and Transportation & Environmental Services.		
Staff Recommendation: APPROVAL		
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<p><u>PLANNING COMMISSION ACTION, JUNE 4, 2019:</u> On a motion made by Commissioner McMahon, seconded by Commissioner Koenig, the Planning Commission voted to recommend approval of the recommendations from Staff related to the Shared Expectations for Open Space in New Development, including the revisions as annotated on the distributions for the Planning Commission, and endorsed the Next Steps as described</p>		

within the staff presentation. The motion carried on a vote of 6 to 0, with Commissioner Wasowski absent.

Reason: The Planning Commission agreed with the staff analysis and recommendation.

Discussion:

Chairman Macek noted that the recent joint work session with the Environmental Policy Commission (EPC) and Park and Recreation Commission (PRC) was valuable and one of the better public meetings he has attended. In response to one of the public speakers, Mr. Macek added that the development cycle continues and will not wait for the publicly accessible open space process, stating that the Shared Expectations are needed to inform private development projects. Mr. Macek questioned whether the term “manifestly communicate” in Item G, which reads “provide clear distinction that intended user group of the space, the open space design should manifestly communicate whether a space is for the private residents, a mix of public and private, or publicly accessible and provide clear transitions and boundaries between different user areas,” is clear in its meaning. Mr. Macek suggested a clearer phrase may say that a project should communicate with inherent design language that the public should feel welcome in the open space. Mr. Macek supported the change to express the at-grade vs above-grade open space as a proportion of total open space. Mr. Macek stated that he was pleased with where the work effort on open space concluded, with a good set of guiding principles on open space, and that this effort will allow the Planning Commission to be better informed on the quality of the open space received in future developments.

Commissioner McMahon noted that she liked the intent of Item G and felt that it provided a good collaboration on the purpose of a project’s open space. Ms. McMahon introduced several proposed edits to the shared expectations. Ms. McMahon commented to staff that the Shared Expectations are intentionally constrained to the character of the open space and the purpose of providing better guidance on what the City needs. Ms. McMahon stated that the process did not pose the question of whether the larger scale quantities of open space are right, so the second proposed revision is a philosophical statement. This second revision states that while the Shared Expectations do not speak to whether we need more net total open space on a site, as we develop out our most dense sites, every inch of open space is valuable, whether it is at-grade or above-grade. This statement acknowledges that as a City with finite space all open space is valuable and should set goals for the best use of open space.

Commissioner Koenig concurred with the statements made by Commissioner McMahon. He commented that the Shared Expectations previously included language referencing a fixed range of 40-60% for at-grade vs. above-grade open space, which appeared to indicate that every project would be solved somewhere within this range. The latest version of this Shared Expectation now recognizes that for projects within denser areas of the City, the proportion of at-grade may be less, while the proportion of above-grade open space may increase, and the total area of open space may be the same.

Commissioner Lyle requested that NAIOP be involved in the next steps of the process due to concerns of layering further expectations on the development community and expressed

concerns that without NAIOP's involvement it is possible that future open space guidelines may not be feasible for new development.

Commissioner Brown noted that this process has moved the discussion of open space significantly beyond when he first started to serve on the Commission.

Speakers:

Jim Kapsis, representing the Environmental Policy Commission, spoke in support of the Shared Expectations document, referencing a work session of the EPC and Planning Commission that occurred a year prior to clarify the City's priorities regarding open space. Ms. Kapsis also referenced the Planning Commission, EPC, and PRC joint work sessions in May, noting the quality of the discussions held at the meeting and that the Shared Expectations reflect the feedback provided in that meeting. Mr. Kapsis commented that it is unclear what the next steps may be, and expressed the desire to continue the dialogue as the process continues to the next steps. Mr. Kapsis highlighted the importance of prioritizing or ranking which open space types may be more valued than other types, noting that all types are valuable, but that some may be more important to the City. Mr. Kapsis closed by recommending that the Shared Expectations be approved by the Planning Commission.

Joseph Crowell, a member the Beautification Commission but speaking as a private citizen, expressed the desire to ensure that processes discussing open space are not performed within silos, and stated that the joint work session was a good example of differing commissions working together. Mr. Crowell cautioned against authorizing staff to alter the zoning ordinance, stating that there is another parallel process for public open space and moving forward on zoning changes based on the Shared Expectations may result in redundancy or conflicts between open space in private development needs and publicly accessible open space needs.

I. DISCUSSION

The goal of the open space discussion series is to analyze the efficacy of and compliance with current open space quantity requirements for open space in new development and investigate qualitative factors of successful private open space in order to develop of set of Shared Expectations and identify potential improvements to policies and practices for open space in new development.

The focus of this process is on open space in new development. While discussions placed private open space in the context of public open space planning, analysis and recommendations were not produced for public open space as this is the purview of the Open Space Master Plan process by the Department of Recreation, Parks, and Cultural Activities (RPCA).

Recommendations for public-private open space (i.e. public access easements) will be addressed through the Publicly Accessible Open Space Policy process led by RPCA, which commenced April 2019.

New public open space is achieved through the development process in two ways, the most common of which is the contribution of multiple developments within a plan area toward new shared public space, either through land dedications or monetary contributions or both. In addition, there is typically also a component of public open provided space on-site. Together these public open space contributions implement the majority of the public open space goals in Small Area Plans, which in turn are based upon City open space policies/plans such as the Open Space Master Plan.

II. BACKGROUND

A. Process & Public Outreach

The open space initiative originated from the Planning Commission and City Council's desire to understand the criteria staff uses to assess open space in new development; specifically, development requesting approval through the Development Special Use (DSUP) and Development Site Plan (DSP) processes.

In response to this request, Planning and Zoning staff incorporated an open space work item to the approved FY2019 Interdepartmental Long-Range Planning Work Program to explore compliance with current open space regulations in new development, potential improvements, and a consistent approach to reviews. The Long-Range Work Program anticipated the open space study to begin January 2018 and culminate with a public hearing in December 2019 to present Staff's findings.

The process has since evolved into a three-part discussion series with the Planning Commission, as well as the Park and Recreation Commission (PRC), and Environmental Policy Commission (EPC). The Open Space discussions were held in three separate portions in February, April, and June 2019 with the Planning Commission, with subsequent meetings, including a Joint Work

Session on May 20, 2019, held to ensure feedback was received from all three commissions.

Table 1 provides a summary of the public meetings held to facilitate the open space discussions.

Table 1: Summary of Open Space Public Meetings

Date	Meeting Description
Summer 2018	Joint Work Session of the Planning Commission and Environmental Policy Commission
February 7, 2019	<u>Planning Commission Work Session 1</u> Staff reviewed the definitions and purpose of open space and existing development's compliance with City regulations.
April 2, 2019	<u>Planning Commission Work Session 2</u> Staff assessed key qualitative factors of open space such as defining the urban form of development, providing visual relief, providing outdoor living opportunities, and serving environmental infrastructure needs using case studies.
April 25, 2019	<u>Park and Recreation Commission (PRC)</u> Staff provided the PRC commissioners with a summary of the Session 1 and 2 open space presentation to the Planning Commission.
May 6, 2019	<u>Environmental Policy Commission (EPC)</u> Staff provided the EPC commissioners with a summary of the Session 1 and 2 open space presentation to the Planning Commission.
May 15, 2019	<u>NAIOP May Meeting</u> Staff provided NAIOP members with a summary of the open space discussion process and next steps.
May 20, 2019	<u>Joint Work Session with the Planning Commission, PRC, EPC</u> The Planning Commission, PRC, and EPC held an open and iterative discussion about the third and final discussion with the Planning Commission where the Shared Expectations were considered, including the establishment of work items for the implementation of these expectations.
June 4, 2019	<u>Planning Commission Session 3</u> The Planning Commission recommended to City Council approval of the Shared Expectations for open space in new development.

B. Environmental Action Plan Phase I and II

The City launched a two-phase update to the City’s Environmental Action Plan (EAP) in September 2017 as it recognized that creating new EAP goals, targets, and actions was essential as climate change impacts became more evident, environmental priorities in the City have evolved, and new short-term actions are needed to replace accomplished activities. The adopted EAP Phase I Update identified goals and short-term actions (FY2019-FY2023) and the EAP Phase II Update established mid (FY2024-FY2029), and long-term (beyond FY2030) action items and legislative priorities.

The open space in new development process is referenced in EAP 2040 Land Use and Open Space Chapter short term action 4.2.3, shown below and in **Attachment 2**.

Short Term Action 4.2.3

By FY 2020, evaluate and update, using a public process, the requirements of open space on residential, commercial, and mixed-use private development. Issues to be addressed include how to achieve meaningful and publicly accessible open space, particularly at the ground level, how to value developer contributions to off-site open space, how to minimize impervious surfaces, how to align vegetation requirements with canopy and native species goals in the Landscape Guidelines; and, how to ensure consistency of open space requirements across similar zones.

The open space in new development process will achieve most of the goals outlined in the action item but will not address “publicly accessible open space” as this will be completed through the Publicly Accessible Open Space Policy process led by RPCA. This process will also not address “align[ing] vegetation requirements with canopy and native species goals” as this item has already been achieved through the Landscape Guidelines 2019 update.

The EAP 2040 document further designates long-term actions and legislative priorities for open space, which are simply actions proposed as a result of this process. Staff recommends that long-term and legislative priorities are those items listed in the “Next Steps” section of this report.

III. OPEN SPACE FINDINGS, COMMONALTIES & KEY DISCUSSION POINTS

A. Findings from Session 1

In Session 1, Staff reviewed the definitions of open space in the Zoning Ordinance, the regulations on required quantity of open space in new development, and recent development’s compliance with City regulations. Further information was given on the use and regulation of above-grade open space in recent development. A detailed review of Staff’s analysis is provided below.

Definition of Open Space

The Zoning Ordinance definition of open space is as follows¹.

Open and usable space

That portion of a lot at ground level which is:

- A) Eight feet or more in width;*
- B) Unoccupied by principal or accessory buildings;*
- C) Unobstructed by other than recreational facilities; and*
- D) Not used in whole or in part as roads, alleys, emergency vehicle easement areas, driveways, maneuvering aisles or off-street parking or loading berths.*

The purpose of open and usable space is to provide areas of trees, shrubs, lawns, pathways and other natural and man-made amenities which function for the use and enjoyment of residents, visitors and other persons.

In its current form, the general definition of open space does not conflict with the sections of the Zoning Ordinance that set out the open space requirements for various zones. However, in practice, the lack of inclusion of above-grade or rooftop open space within this definition may limit the ability of staff and developers to utilize this method to provide open space.

Additionally, the requirement above for “Eight feet or more in width” as stated in the general definition of open space has excluded the allowance of small green spaces in townhouse areas, including historic districts, where it may be beneficial. Additionally, it may lead to a collection of disjointed spaces meeting the minimum of 8’ by 8’ without serving the roles of open space (defined later in the staff report), as has been utilized on several projects to meet their open space requirements.

Open Space Requirements

The majority of zones that require a minimum quantity of open space set a percentage requirement of 40% of the total site area. The following table provides a listing of these zones and their FAR regulations.

Table 2: Zones with 40% Required Open Space

Zone	FAR (maximum)	Open Space required
CRMU-L/Commercial Residential Mixed Use (Low)	1.5	40%
CRMU-M/Commercial Residential Mixed Use (Medium)	2.0	40%
CRMU-H/Commercial Residential Mixed Use (High)	2.5	40%
RCX/Medium Density Apartment	1.25	40% (or more)
RC/High Density Apartment	1.25	40% (or more)

¹ The definition quoted does not include date-based and similar exceptions listed in the zoning ordinance.

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RD/High Density Apartment	No maximum	40%
CL/Commercial Low	0.75	40%
CC/Commercial Community	0.75	40%
CSL/Commercial Service Low	0.75	40%
CG/Commercial General	0.75	40%
CD/Commercial Downtown	1.5	40%
OC/Office Commercial	1.25	40%
OCM/Office Commercial Medium	1.5	40%
OCH/Office Commercial High	2.0/3.0	40%

Exceptions to the requirement of 40% open space are as follows².

Table 3: Variants of Zoning Requirements for Open Space

Zone	FAR	Open Space required	Alternative Calculations
RM/Townhouse	1.5	35%	Min. 300 sf, date limited to 1992
RS/Townhouse	0.75	35%	
RT/Townhouse	0.5	70% ³	
RA/Multifamily	0.75		800 sf open space per dwelling unit (amount varies, could equal ~50%)
RB/Townhouse	0.75		800 sf open space per dwelling unit (amount varies, could equal ~50%)
CRMU-X/ Commercial residential (Old Town North)	2.5	25%	
CDX	2.5	25% Multifamily 40% Single & Two-family	
W-1/Waterfront	2.0		300 sf open space per dwelling unit

Of these variations, there does not appear to be a strong linkage between the density (Floor Area Ratio or FAR) allowed in the zone and the percentage requirement for open space. For instance, the zones CRMU-H and CRMU-X both allow for a FAR of 2.5 with special use permits (SUPs), however, where the CRMU-H zone requires 40% open space, the CRMU-X zone only requires 25%. Another comparison is that the High-Density Apartment Zone (RD) has no maximum to the FAR allowed, yet still requires 40% open space.

² Cluster development zoning is not included in the analysis.

³ 70% open space requirement is inferred by the requirement that no more than 30% of the lot may be covered by buildings or structures.

Open Space Compliance

The majority of development cases within the last five years have met or exceeded their open space requirements for their zone (refer to **Table 4** below). In order to meet these requirements, several projects have provided a percentage of the open space as above-grade or rooftop open space, often with resident amenities.

Table 4: Case Review of Compliance

Open Space Requirement	% of Cases in Compliance	% of Cases utilizing Rooftop
Overall	84%	57%
25-35% Open Space	64%	38%
40% Open Space	70%	70%
Coordinated Development Districts (CDDs)	99%	---

In reviewing the cases behind the numbers listed above, a significant portion of cases that did not meet their required percentage of open space were not allowed to count the above-grade open space that was provided. For instance, in the CD zone no above-grade open space may be calculated toward the requirement, while in the RC zone only 10% of above-grade open space may be counted. In these cases, projects may have met or exceeded their required open space percentage if the above-grade open space were added to the calculation. This also appears to be a contributing factor for developments in townhome zones where projects may not meet the required open space requirement because above grade open space, such as patios or deck, are not allowed to count as open space.

In cases that have not met their open space requirements, a modification has been requested and granted. When projects do not comply with open space requirements, staff may negotiate contributions to support neighboring public open spaces. These contributions help offset the additional demand from new development upon existing public open space and other public benefits. These contributions are variable and based on neighborhood needs identified by City staff, including RPCA staff, during the development process. Examples of developments that provided a contribution are presented in **Table 5** below:

Table 5: Open Space Contributions Case Studies

Case	Cameron Park	Harris Teeter	Potomac Yard Park System
Required Open Space	25% at grade	40% at grade	Comprehensive network of open space as part of CDD with a variety of experiences. Individual sites may have lower open space requirements.
Provided Open Space	19% at grade 8% above grade	25% above grade	
Contribution	Provided contributions to fund neighborhood improvements and other community benefits.	Improvements to nearby Montgomery Park. Established park maintenance fund for Montgomery Park.	

Cameron Park and Harris Teeter are individual development projects which could not meet on-site ground level open space requirements and provided contributions based on development negotiations. Potomac Yards is an example of a Small Area Plan (SAP) and coordinated development district (CDD) where the project as a whole established the necessary public open space in which each site contributes towards achieving the overall goal. Individual sites within CDDs, therefore, may have little or no open space requirements.

B. Findings from Session 2

Roles and Commonalities

During Session 2, staff examined development cases that had been approved and constructed against four roles of open space that capture the quality factors of successful open space. The four roles include:

- **Historic: Form Defining** - 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.
- **Historic: Visual Relief** - the open space provides sufficient distance or setback between buildings within the development or adjacent structures to provide clear separation between masses and/or the provision of light.
- **Evolving: Outdoor Living** - the provision of essential resources such as shade and seating in combination with passive and recreational activity spaces or features that encourage the animated use of the open space.
- **Evolving: Environmental** - the provision of green infrastructure to meet the regulatory requirements and policy goals of the City and State for canopy cover and stormwater management and quality.

Of these, the two historic roles, form defining and visual relief, address the way that the building sits on a site and the provision of light and air to the residents and the neighborhood. The roles derive from the function early zoning laws played in the United States, which was to protect public health and safety. The evolving roles, outdoor living and environmental, are recent considerations based on resident's demand for usable space and the need to provide environmental functions, such as stormwater management, as required through recent regulation.

The case studies that were highlighted included residential developments ranging from a four-lot townhouse development to large multi-family buildings. The majority of the case studies examined were approved through either a DSP or DSUP within the last 15 years.

From the case studies, Staff illustrated a number of commonalities of successful projects in order to look at the quality factors that led to their success. These commonalities are listed below:

- Better developments have open space that address all four roles: visibility, form defining, outdoor living, environmental;
- Good open space connects the community of the building with the community of the neighborhood;

- Open space is not a residual aspect of the design process but integral to the site functionality and presentation;
- Successful projects typically have a clear delineation between the public and private realm, including where the public realm may simply be the public sidewalk;
- Private open space is important; and,
- Well executed open space relieves pressure on the use of public open space.

Visibility and Above Grade Open Space.

Further, from the analysis of the visibility of open space, which is to say that portion of the open space that is visible from the public realm, Staff found that the projects highlighted generally provide 15-20% out of 40% as visible space, or generally 50/50. Less successful case studies exhibit a similar range, indicating that the amount of visible versus non-visible open space may not determine whether open space is successful or not.

Drawing a comparison to above grade space, the amount of non-visible open space may, however, provide a good guide for the allowance of above-grade space as the functions of form-defining and visual access are not accounted by either, and instead the focus is on the roles of outdoor living and green infrastructure. Staff's analysis of the case studies also identified that projects can provide above-ground open space that fulfill the needed environmental roles, like green roofs or tree canopy coverage.

C. Key Discussion Points from City Commissions

The members of the Planning Commission, PRC, and EPC provided discussion on staff's open space findings during the public meetings listed in **Table 1**. The key points of the discussion are highlighted below in **Table 6** and provided the groundwork for the Shared Expectations for open space in new development that were recommended by the Planning Commission.

Table 6: Key Discussion Points from City Commissions

Key Discussion Point	Detail
Support for An Appropriate Mix of Above-Ground and At-Grade Open Space	Commissioners voiced support for an appropriate mix of above ground and at-grade open space. Commissioners generally agreed that the mix should fluctuate dependent upon the density of the neighborhood or development, but that further study is needed in order to establish new quantitative regulations.
Flexibility to Reflect the Context of the Area and Should be Planning on a Larger Scale	Commissioners consistently stated that open space should be looked at from a neighborhood perspective, or larger scale, and not always by individual site. Open space use depends on the context of the neighborhood and what

	<p>public open space is available (or not available) nearby. Open space on private land could provide services that are absent in public parks. Some Commissioners stated that publicly accessible open space on private land could provide connections in the public park system. Overall, Commissioners believed that an area-wide strategy for private open space is important and considered Small Area Plans as a necessary tool in open space planning.</p>
<p>The 40% May or May Not Be Appropriate for All Zones or Areas of the City</p>	<p>Some Commissioners stated that the 40% minimum at-grade open space requirement may still be an appropriate standard for private development, however, others expressed that density or context (proximity to Metro, etc.) should influence the minimum open space requirement. Overall, Commissioners generally supported allowing a higher ratio of above-grade open space to count for the quantity requirements for developments in dense areas of the city.</p>
<p>Qualitative Versus Quantitative Tools for Assessing Private Open Space</p>	<p>Commissioners agreed that future open space regulations should continue to be quantitative in nature, but qualitative standards should be adopted as well. The quantitative requirements should be listed in the Zoning Ordinance while the qualitative guidelines could be listed in a referenced set of guidelines, similar to the structure of the Landscape Guidelines. Several Commissioners expressed that only meeting required percentages can lead to not-so-great outcomes.</p>
<p>Private Open Space Planning Should be Intentional and Small Pockets of Open Space Should be Avoided.</p>	<p>Commissioners indicated that open space on private development should not be an afterthought and that small pockets of residual open space should be avoided whenever possible. To avoid small areas of unused open space, commissioners suggested that open space planning should be initiated at the beginning of the site design process and that these spaces should have specific goals; which may lead to higher quality open space.</p>
<p>Private Open Space Should Relieve the Burden on Public Parks</p>	<p>Commissioners asserted that private open in new development should provide amenities for residents that may relieve capacity issues for public parks. Commissioners cited The Del Ray Tower apartment complex dog park as a successful private open space where the dog park directly relieves capacity issues with other dog parks in the dog-populous Del Ray area. Another</p>

	example was the provision of a private pool - while some apartment complexes are not able or large enough to support this type of amenity, those developments that do take the burden off the City's public pool system.
Private Open Space Guidelines Will Lead to Better Planned Spaces	Commissioners suggested that a list of open space Shared Expectations could illustrate to developers what open space characteristics are a priority to the City. If the City's expectations are available to developers, they may consider the City's open space expectations early in the site design process, which benefits both the developer and staff.
Tree Preservation on Private Land	Preservation of existing natural features, especially mature trees is important to Commissioners.
Future Staff Report Restructuring	There was a statement that future staff reports should analyze open space in terms of the Shared Expectations considered through this open space process. In addition to the open space table already provided in reports, staff could provide a qualitative narrative referencing the expectations.
Developer Contributions	When considering open space contributions, it is essential to consider the totality of what the development is contributing for the development of the property.

D. Lessons from Other Jurisdictions

Neighboring Jurisdictions

The open space requirements of Alexandria are generally in line with the neighboring jurisdictions of Fairfax County and Arlington. Drawing a direct correlation to these municipalities is challenging as the density of development and the metrics for open space vary widely. In the case of Fairfax, many of their zones have a significantly lower density (FAR), so while the required open space is lower, at 10-25% of the density of Alexandria zones, the result would be significantly more open space. Where the allowable density in residential zones is comparable to Alexandria, the required open space is likewise comparable (ex. Fairfax zone R30, FAR 1.0, with 40% required open space). While Arlington uses a different methodology to require open space, the majority of the lower density residential zones require greater than 40% open space for developments. Commercial zones in Arlington do have generally lower open space requirements than mixed used zones in Alexandria.

Washington DC Green Area Ratio (GAR)

The Green Area Ratio is an environmental sustainability zoning regulation that integrates landscape elements into parcel site design to promote sustainable development. GAR sets minimum lot-coverage standards for landscape and site design features to promote greater livability, ecological function, green space accessibility and climate adaptation in the urban environment. The GAR assigns a weighted score to development sites based on the features that are implemented and the amount of area they cover. The minimum required GAR score needed to reach compliance differs by zoning district. City Staff analyzed the applicability of a GAR-type system to the City of Alexandria. The analysis found that a number of core criteria that are requirements of the development review process in Alexandria would need to be made flexible in whole or in part. Flexibility in this case could mean a significant reduction in the required criteria, including such examples as amount of at-grade open space and canopy cover.

IV. RECOMMENDED OPEN SPACE SHARED EXPECTATIONS

The open space Shared Expectations, recommended by the Planning Commission, are the result of a collaborative effort with the Planning Commission, PRC, EPC, and P&Z, RPCA, and T&ES staff and are a direct outgrowth of the preceding discussions and feedback from these three commissions. Additionally, they address the “commonalities” that were presented as lessons learned from successful open spaces in recent new developments within the City of Alexandria.

The Shared Expectations created through this process express those characteristics of open space that are important to the City and will be utilized to guide the amendment of current practices, policies, and regulations for open space in new development as outlined in the “Next Steps” section of the staff report. The Shared Expectations are listed below and included as **Attachment 1**.

Table 6: Open Space in New Development Shared Expectations

<p>A. It is desirable for open space in new development to achieve all four “roles:” form-defining, visual relief, outdoor living, and environmental benefit:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 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.

<p>B. New development has an important role in the provision of public and public-private open space.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 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.
<p>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.</p>
<p>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”:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 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.
<p>E. Open space should be purposefully integrated into the site design and user services or facilities of the development.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 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.
<p>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</p>

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 open 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.

V. NEXT STEPS

Based on the City Council's endorsement of the Shared Expectations for Open Space in New Development, a series of work efforts would be initiated to implement the content of these expectations. These work efforts may include the following.

A. Regulatory Changes

A process to alter the regulations contained in the Zoning Ordinance through text amendments would be initiated. Based on the analysis contained in this Staff report, the following is a list of recommendations for alteration of the zoning ordinance, policies, and procedures regarding open space. This listing primarily pertains to projects that would require a DSP or DSUP approval. Further study would be required to address projects within fully developed areas (such as Old Town) where grading plan and building permits are the predominant applications.

- Revision(s) to the definitions of open space;
- Alteration of minimum dimensions of open space to reflect context;
- Alteration of open space quantity requirements in high density and low-density zones; and,
- Allowance of above grade open space in all zones.

B. Open Space Design Guidelines

A set of guidelines to ensure that open space in new development achieves the Shared Expectations would be created. The guidelines would apply to development proposals seeking approval as a Grading Plan, Development Site Plan, Development Special Use Permit, and/ or Special Use Permit and would supplement existing City plans, policies, and ordinances regarding open space in private development; such as the City's small area plans. The guidelines would be an operational document that provides Staff and the Planning Commission with criteria to analyze open space in new development proposals. Potential guidelines are listed below.

- Ratio for above grade open space and quality parameters;
- Integration of open space into the building form;
- Provision of outdoor activities and programmed uses; and,
- Integration of green infrastructure.

C. Small Area Plan Coordination

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. Small Area Plans use those citywide plans and policies to provide more specific guidance for the provision of open space in development areas of the plan. Future Small Area Plans will be informed by the Shared Expectations and may include future recommendations for determination of public, public-private, and private open space as well as contribution mechanisms for non-complying projects.

VI. CONCLUSION

Staff recommends the City Council endorse the Shared Expectations and authorize the future tasks as outlined in the Next Steps section of the staff report.

VII. ATTACHMENTS

1. Shared Expectations for Open Space in New Development
2. Environmental Action Plan (EAP) 2040 Land Use and Open Space Chapter, adopted July 9, 2019.

Open Space in New Development Shared Expectations

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

K. 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.

- L. **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.
- M. **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.
- N. **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.
- O. **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.
- P. **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.

- Q. **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.
- R. **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.
- S. **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.
- T. **Increase the deterrence of crime through environmental design.** Use design strategies to create open 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.



LAND USE AND OPEN SPACE



The City of Alexandria is committed to protecting and promoting public open space with a healthy tree canopy. It is an investment in a higher quality of life for residents, visitors, and future generations. The City seeks to protect public open space because:

- It connects the community: Our parks and facilities are the public's common ground that equitably bring together our vibrant and diverse community.
- It improves well-being: Our programs and facilities motivate the community to make healthy choices and live active lifestyles through all stages of life and at all levels and abilities.
- It is an investment in our environment: Our commitment to natural spaces provides physical, mental, and community benefits, while offering opportunities to engage with and conserve our natural resources.

The City achieved a tree canopy of 36 percent in 2016 and has planted about 800 trees per year over the last several years. It also exceeded the 2009 goal of acquiring 100 new acres of open space and maintained a ratio of 7.3 acres of open space per 1,000 residents.

The EAP 2040 actions align with the Open Space Master Plan (2003, updated 2017) and the Recreation, Parks and Cultural Activities Strategic Plan to increase the tree canopy to 40 percent by 2035. The Department of Planning and Zoning development process supports the tree canopy and open space goals of this section and balances the private and public open space needs in Small Area Plans and in private and public development and non-development projects.

4 Land Use and Open Space

4.1 TREE CANOPY

GOAL

Preserve and expand a healthy urban tree canopy

TARGET

By FY2035, average overall tree canopy will be a minimum of 40 percent

SHORT-TERM ACTIONS

4.1.1

By FY2023, update and coordinate the Urban Forestry Master Plan, Environmental and Sustainability Management System (ESMS), and Landscape Guidelines (updated in FY2019) to support increased tree preservation, expansion, maintenance, native species use, and a revised tree canopy coverage goal.

Cost Estimate: \$40,000 per year

Cost Breakdown: \$30,000–\$40,000 per year. \$30,000 for the yearly tree inventory study plus \$10,000 for the tree canopy survey scheduled for every three years.



4.1.2

By FY2023, enlist City partnerships (community groups) to provide education and outreach to provide technical assistance and opportunities to increase native tree canopy coverage on private property.

Cost Estimate: Existing staff resources



4.1.3

By FY2028, develop an urban forest health index rating system to determine the current and ongoing health and health needs of the urban forest in Alexandria.

Cost Estimate: \$100,000



4.1.4

By FY2028, develop a program that supports the planting of trees on private property, commit funding to establish the program and support ongoing implementation.

Cost Estimate: \$25,000/year





LONG-TERM ACTIONS

4.1.5

By FY2029, update the Urban Forestry Master Plan to support increased tree preservation, expansion, maintenance, native species use, and a revised tree canopy coverage goal.

Cost Estimate: \$30,000



4.2 OPEN SPACE

GOAL

Increase open space quantity and improve the environmental quality, management, and social benefits of open space

TARGET

Maintain the ratio of 7.3 acres of publicly accessible open space per 1,000 residents

SHORT-TERM ACTIONS

4.2.1

By FY2023, protect and add open space through acquisition, preservation, and conservation as prescribed in the Open Space Master Plan (updated 2017) and by FY2023, evaluate increasing the target to 7.5 acres per 1,000 residents. This includes, by FY2020, City Council will re-establish the open space steering committee to re-assess the methodology, evaluate, and prioritize potential open space sites. Tools to be considered for open space preservation or restoration will include the purchase of easements or repurposing land as funds can be made available, development occurs, or partnerships can facilitate.

Cost Estimate: The proposed FY20-29 CIP provides \$13,175,000 for Open Space acquisition and development. Any proposed changes to this funding will be evaluated through the Open Space Steering Committee's action findings.

Cost Breakdown: The action is also dependent on the development envisioned in small area plans, including city investments, developer contributions, and private philanthropic contributions.





4.2.2

By FY2023, increase the percentage of acres of public natural lands that are actively managed, including restoration and invasive species removal, by 50 percent to 450 acres.

Cost Estimate: Existing staff resources



4.2.3

By FY2020, evaluate and update, using a public process, the requirements of open space on residential, commercial and mixed-use private development. Issues to be addressed include how to achieve meaningful and publicly accessible open space, particularly at the ground level; how to value developer contributions to off-site open space; how to minimize impervious surfaces; how to align vegetation requirements with canopy and native species goals in the Landscape Guidelines; and; how to ensure consistency of open space requirements across similar zones.

Cost Estimate: Existing staff resources



MID-TERM ACTIONS

4.2.4

By FY2028, identify tools and techniques through stream valley plans to maintain and enhance all of the City's stream valleys including public access points for ecological and recreational benefits. The plans will be updated every 10 years.

Cost Estimate: \$250,000/10 years (new request)

Cost Breakdown: Based on previous similar plans. Note that this does not include plan implementation which will be determined based on findings of the plan.





MID-TERM ACTIONS

4.2.5

By FY2028, seek publicly accessible open space opportunities in unconventional spaces:

- a. Further evaluate the City's network of public alleys and define those most appropriate for informal recreational use and/or green infrastructure improvements.
- b. Work with Northern Virginia Conservation Trust to identify potential locations for conservation easements, particularly those that would connect or are adjacent to existing open spaces.
- c. Identify and map opportunities to re-purpose public rights-of-way and parking lots for other public uses, including interim and/or permanent recreational use and open space, affordable housing, schools, or other public facilities.
- d. Protect and preserve institutional open space by:
 - i. Pursuing easements for trails and/or ecosystem corridors through institutional space to connect with public open space.
 - ii. Develop mechanisms, possibly including incentives, for public/private partnerships to maintain and enhance natural areas on institutional land

Cost Estimate: \$60,000/year (part of approved CIP)

Cost Breakdown: The City currently holds a contract with Northern Virginia Conservation Trust to advise on open space concerns and these action items can be added to our joint work plan.



Justification

A healthy and diverse urban forest canopy coverage in Alexandria provides a broad range of environmental and social benefits such as reduced GHG emissions, improved air quality, enhanced property values, stormwater and flood mitigation, public health benefits, and vibrant public spaces. The reduction of GHG emissions improves air quality and contributes to health and wellness.

Legislative Priorities

Advocate for state legislation that would enable the City to expand tree protection and preservation and to increase tree canopy requirements.

Accountable Parties

Recreation, Parks and Cultural Activities (primary); Planning and Zoning, Transportation and Environmental services.