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City of Alexandria, Virginia

MEMORANDUM

DATE: OCTOBER 16, 2019
TO: THE HONORABLE MAYOR AND MEMBERS OF CITY COUNCIL
FROM: MARK B. JINKS, CITY MANAGER /s/

DOCKET TITLE:

Consideration of Reinstatement of the Ad Hoc Open Space Steering Committee.

ISSUE: Consideration of Reinstatement of the Open Space Steering Committee.

RECOMMENDATION: That City Council:

1. Receive the recommendation from the City Manager to reinstate the Ad Hoc Open Space Steering Committee to assist staff in the development of an Open Space Policy Plan as described below; and
2. Authorize the City Manager to appoint members to the Ad Hoc Open Space Steering Committee as described in this memorandum to serve a term beginning January 2020 and not longer than December 31, 2022.

BACKGROUND: In 2002, City Council approved an Open Space Master Plan. A Council appointed Ad Hoc Open Space Steering Committee advised staff on the development of the plan, including policies and open space goals. Since then, the City has achieved its goal of adding 100 additional protected acres of open space and has maintained a ratio of 7.3 acres of publicly accessible open space per 1,000 residents. Subsequently, in 2017, Recreation, Parks, and Cultural Activities updated the plan to evaluate our current open space situation and consider additional recommendations. The City also approved the Environmental Action Plan 2040, which includes open space recommendations (action items 4.2.1 and 4.2.3).

As the City increases in population and building density with finite land constraints, there is greater challenge in increasing the publicly accessible open space quantity. Reinstating the Open Space Steering Committee will bring together community stakeholders to advise staff on reconsidering open space policies and evaluating methods of open space acquisition, as outlined in the scope of work to follow, in order to ensure that our public spaces, parks, and natural areas offer high environmental quality, management, and social benefits for the residents and businesses of Alexandria.

DISCUSSION: The Ad Hoc Open Space Steering Committee is proposed to be City Council authorized and City Manager appointed. Five members of the Committee would be nominated by existing City Boards and Commissions. The City Manager would appoint the Chair. The Committee is proposed to be comprised of 11 members:

- Historic Alexandria Resources Commission Member or designee
- Beautification Commission Member or designee
- Environmental Policy Commission Member or designee
- Planning Commission Member or designee
- Park and Recreation Commission Member or designee
- Northern Virginia Conservation Trust City of Alexandria Board Member
- One at-large member from the business community
- One at-large member from the development community
- Three at-large City resident members

Action items will include re-assessment of the methodology, policies, and tools for evaluating future publicly accessible open space sites, whether through City purchase or by acquisition or public access easements through development. Through this process, the Ad Hoc Open Space Steering Committee will evaluate the Environmental Action Plan 2040 recommendation to evaluate increasing the current open space ratio of 7.3 acres per 1,000 to 7.5 acres per 1,000. The Open Space Steering Committee will sunset after completion of its charge of work, as outlined below.

Ad Hoc Open Space Steering Charge of Work

1. Update the definition of “Publicly Accessible Open Space”
 - a. Provide a recommendation for updating and clarifying the definition of what types of publicly accessible open space (use, type, function, and extent of public accessibility) “counts” toward the City’s public open space goals. This would provide guidance on easement language (how much and what forms of public access must be provided for it to count) and future policy changes.
 - b. Provide a recommendation for updating the “Public Open Space” (POS) zone to reflect modern park and recreation functions, such as: play features, lighting (trail lighting, safety lighting, athletic lighting, etc), ballfield amenities, etc.
2. Evaluate and recommend methods of pursuing new publicly accessible open space.
 - a. Develop criteria for considering opportunities for open space acquisition through the Open Space Fund (such as connectivity, walkability to neighborhood needs, access to water, etc.).
 - b. Develop minimum publicly accessible open space criteria for small area plans based on current and future demographic needs and neighborhood characteristics.
 - c. Evaluate the Open Space Ratio and/or other targets based on national standards and benchmarks for localities with similar densities.
3. Building on Planning & Zonings briefings with the Planning Commission on “Open Space in New Development” work sessions in FY 2019, provide guidance for new development’s contribution to publicly accessible open space where it is not already guided by a small area plan, particularly to clarify:

- a. When new development is contributing to off-site publicly accessible open space;
- b. What development contributions are planned for; and
- c. How a reasonable contribution from new development will be determined and calculated.

The charge of work is shown in a suggested order of sequence with the following rationale:

1. The definition of publicly accessible open space will influence changes in items 2, and 3.
2. Item 2 will evaluate the overall context of new publicly accessible open space throughout the City based on demographics.
3. New ratios and/or targets, determined in item 2, will be evaluated on the basis of general studies of publicly accessible open space needs (and performance measures) here and in other communities/nationally, the City's future population, and the cost/feasibility of achieving an increased goal through the current set of delivery systems.
4. Item 3 will provide guidance on how these goals will be implemented through small area plans and, by extension, through the development review process.

FISCAL IMPACT: Recommendations from the proposed Ad Hoc Steering Committee will likely result in future fiscal impacts.

STAFF:

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