

Frequently Asked Questions on the Proposed Housing Affordability/Land Use Strategy presented at 9/27/2023 Community Meeting

Land Use Strategy

1. What is the purpose of the three different areas proposed in the land use strategy and how did you come up with them?

We identified these areas by looking at three different factors:

- What areas can be redeveloped that won't displace existing residents?
- Where can new development be located so that its accessible to transit lines?
- What properties have existing zoning to redevelop in AlexWest?

Prioritizing development on existing surface parking lots and in commercial areas rather than redeveloping existing residential areas is an **anti-displacement strategy**. It adds more housing without displacing existing residents through infill development (when developers build on land that *fills in* gaps between buildings, like on parking lots).

Building close to transit lines means that residents in the new housing will have more convenient access by transit to jobs, amenities, and services, which reduces the need for a car (reducing household living expenses) and reduces congestion. And lastly, we need to make sure that when properties with existing approvals develop, they produce affordable housing and contribute community benefits.

All these factors (surface parking lots, large commercial buildings, transit lines, and numerous existing approvals) led to the recommendation to designate the "**Focus Area.**" Combined, this area offers likely/known opportunities to incentivize development of non-residential areas and obtain more affordable housing and other community benefits in the process.

Area 2: While some development may happen in Area 2, there are fewer surface parking lots to prioritize. If development occurs, the plan will recommend criteria that makes sure we get important community benefits such as roads, open space, and affordable housing.

Area 3: There are limited surface parking lots and no existing development approvals. **Area 3:** There are limited surface parking lots and no existing development approvals in Area 3. Most of this area is single family homes and condo communities which are unlikely to develop at a large scale in the near future. This area will be subject to City policies and regulations.

2. What are the densities and building heights envisioned within the areas?

Density and height have not been decided yet – these topics will be discussed at upcoming community meetings happening between October and December.

3. When and how will other elements like open space and transportation be integrated with the land use areas?

We will be presenting open space and transportation concepts for community discussion at the community meetings happening between October and December.

4. What is the time frame anticipated for the build-out being envisioned by the plan?

Most of our City plans envision a 20-30 year build-out, which is the time frame we are using for this plan.

5. Will uses such as office and retail be allowed?

The intent of the of the land use strategy is that commercial uses (which include office and retail) will generally be limited to the Focus Area and Area 2. Retail areas will be presented for community discussion during the community meetings between October and December.

6. Where will people park if you build on surface parking lots?

Any redevelopment projects on surface parking lots will need to provide new parking to meet the need for existing and future residents.

7. What's so bad about surface parking lots?

Many surface parking lots in AlexWest were built before the City started strictly regulating stormwater runoff. Because of that, current surface parking lots do not generally manage or treat stormwater to current water quality standards. This means that when it rains, water can't soak into the ground through the surface parking lot, instead flowing into neighboring areas and picking up pollutants along the way. Any new redevelopment will need to meet the City's updated stormwater management and water quality requirements. In addition, surface parking lots can increase surrounding temperatures.

8. What will happen to businesses if you build in commercial areas?

We believe that most redevelopment of commercial areas will occur where the buildings are vacant due to low demand for office space. Some commercial redevelopment will occur in existing retail areas where the property owner has made a business decision to redevelop. We've heard from you about the need for neighborhood-serving retail, restaurant options, coffee shops, and other neighborhood amenities. In the Fall, you'll have an opportunity to provide input on where retail will be required or recommended in the future if redevelopment occurs and consider strategies that can work to incentivize or retain small businesses.

9. If property owners have existing zoning, can they move forward before the approval of the plan?

Property owners may only move forward before the approval of the new Plan if they are complying with the existing Plan in place (the 2012 Beauregard Plan or the 1992 Alexandria West Plan) and their existing zoning.

10. How and when will the impacts of the planned development be evaluated?

Impacts of the planned development on community resources such as the road network, schools, and sewer infrastructure are currently being studied. The Plan will include standards and recommendations for mitigating the impacts of development and providing required community amenities. This information will be shared with the community later this fall and early in 2024.

Displacement Concerns

11. What happens if people get displaced because of new development?

We think it's important to be honest and realistic about the extent of the problem and our ability to effect change: **Ultimately, the City's ability to control development is limited and we cannot always prevent displacement.** Certainly, however, doing nothing will lead to much more displacement than if we do what we're hoping to in this Plan. We are committed to producing more committed affordable housing and minimizing displacement through the tools we have available to us.

The City's goal is to minimize displacement. Minimizing displacement takes lots of tools and work; some tools we are not able to use because of Virginia law. Our land use strategy (described above), which prioritizes development of land that does not have housing on it, is one way we hope to steer development/redevelopment *away* from land that would displace residents.

In the event of displacement, the Office of Housing offers information, coordination, and other relocation assistance to residents who are impacted by potential redevelopment or renovations of existing apartment buildings. This includes:

- Voluntary Relocation Advisory to tenants
- Voluntary moving expense assistance
- Required relocation plan for development applications that involve displacement, considered by PC and CC

More information about housing programs and services can be found here:

- Office of Housing website: <https://www.alexandriava.gov/Housing>
- Resources for Renters: <https://www.alexandriava.gov/housing-services/renter-resources>
- 2023 Housing Resource Guide: <https://www.alexandriava.gov/sites/default/files/2023-06/2023HousingResourceGuide.pdf>

Housing Policies

12. Can the City impose rent control?

The State of Virginia does currently not allow jurisdictions to impose rent control. In order for Alexandria to use this tool, permission would need to be granted by the Virginia General Assembly. The City is planning to submit a legislative package in the future that asks for permission to use these tools. The City does have a Voluntary Rent Increase Policy, where landlord can agree to limit annual rent increases to 5% or less. You can read the 2019 Voluntary Rent Guidelines Resolution [here](#).

13. Can the City use inclusionary zoning?

The State of Virginia does not currently allow jurisdictions to use inclusionary zoning, which is when they can require any new development over a certain threshold, typically over a certain number of units, to provide a specific percentage of the total units at affordable rates. Instead, the City is able to use something called a “density bonus.” That means that developers are allowed to build a building that is taller (and so has more residential units) than would normally be allowed *so long as* a percentage of the additional units are set aside as affordable.

14. Can the City buy market affordable units to keep them affordable or build more affordable housing?

While the City has provided funding in the past in the form of loans or grants to assist affordable housing non-profit partners to construct or purchase affordable housing, such as with the Spire, St. James, and Nexus in AlexWest, the City does not currently have funding available to do this consistently or on a large scale. For that reason, we need to consider a combination of many tools and funding sources to address the housing affordability need.

15. Does this plan provide housing to families earning less than 50% AMI? Less than 30% AMI? If so, how much?

We don't know specifics yet, but the goal, based on the need and feedback received to date, would be to provide housing affordability that serves a range of household incomes, including for households at or below 30% AMI.

Housing Production

16. What is going to happen on Morgan Properties?

Currently there are no known near-term plans to redevelop the garden apartments owned by Morgan Properties (Lynbrook, Willow Hill, Brookdale, Meadow Creek, Bennington Crossing). However, Morgan Properties has existing development approvals from the 2012 Beauregard Plan and Coordinated Development District (CDD) zoning on most of their garden apartment complexes, excluding Bennington Crossing. That means that they are already legally allowed to build on their property so long as it matches what is in the 2012 Plan and the CDD Zoning. They could decide they want to do this tomorrow and they would be able to. However, many changes have occurred in the economy and the region since the approvals in 2012. This Plan is an opportunity to take another look at what we (the community) think should happen here.

17. Why can't we produce more affordable housing? This doesn't seem like enough.

We agree that we need to build more affordable housing to meet the needs of our residents as many households are stretched thin living in AlexWest. There are multiple reasons why it is very difficult to produce more affordable housing. First, Virginia State law severely limits what the City can do. We can only require that affordable housing be provided by developers when they receive a density bonus, (when they are allowed to build a building that is taller (and so has more residential units) than would normally be allowed *so long as* a percentage of those units are set aside as affordable). Second, the cost

to construct affordable housing is very high and the City does not have the ability or money to build affordable housing on its own.

18. Why do we need to build more housing? Isn't what we have enough?

Yes, we can work with what we have *and* we need to build more housing. We need to work to keep the current levels of affordability in AlexWest. At the same time, we also know that we need more housing *in general*, in order to accommodate a growing City and neighborhood. Increasing the housing supply will in the long-term help keep the rental market from continuing to escalate. In addition, one of the best ways for the City to obtain additional affordable housing in the shorter term is through the development of new buildings or the redevelopment of existing buildings.

19. What happens if we do nothing?

Doing nothing (keeping things as they are) is not a neutral choice: we risk losing the market affordable units that are currently in AlexWest (and tenants living in these units risk displacement) and we miss out on chances to get Committed Affordable Units when new development or redevelopment is proposed.

20. How much housing can we require developers to provide when they build new buildings?

The City is limited in how much it can require developers to do when they build new buildings. One method the City can use, discussed in Question 9, is Density Bonuses. This can be achieved through the City's Section 7-700 provision of the Zoning Ordinance, which requires that one third of the additional density must be provided as affordable housing. The same concept can be applied through requirements established in a Small Area Plan, where new development is required to provide an established percentage of new development above their existing zoning as affordable housing. Whether the AlexWest Plan proposes this type of tool and if so at what percentage hasn't been determined yet. The topic will be further discussed during the meetings between October and December.

21. How many affordable units are anticipated with this land use strategy?

We don't have this information yet but will provide it at an upcoming meeting in November.

22. How will property owners that are discussing redevelopment be subject to the provisions of the plan?

Property owners will be subject to all the standards and recommendations of the future Plan, including the provision of affordable housing, open space, streetscape improvements, infrastructure, etc. The details of these Plan requirements have not been developed yet, and draft concepts/recommendations will be shared with the community for input in the meetings between October and December.