



AlexWest Plan Frequently Asked Questions (FAQ)
As of May 3, 2024
Additional questions may be added as they arise.

1. Why do we need a new Plan?

Creating an updated community vision for the future allows us to proactively plan for change and prepare for challenges and opportunities in the years to come. Creating a great City and great neighborhoods don't just happen. This plan is intended to build on the many strengths of the area while building lasting value and opportunity for all residents. An updated Plan will enable:

- Comprehensive updates of the existing 10-30 year-old land use plans ([1992 Alexandria West Small Area Plan](#) and [2012 Beauregard Small Area Plan](#)) to address current community needs and incorporate current city policies and best practices.
- Addressing near and mid-term housing vulnerability and affordability by prioritizing development that minimizes resident displacement, leverages new committed affordable housing through development, housing resources, and partnerships.
- An approach developed with the city and community to guide and shape future development and make expectations clear for the community, city and developers.

2. What happens if we do nothing?

Without a Plan, the housing challenges faced by many existing residents in AlexWest will continue to worsen. With limited new housing stock, rents will continue to increase, resulting in a decline in market affordable units and increased displacement of Alex West's most vulnerable residents. Additionally, the number of potential committed affordable units that are generated through redevelopment based on the Plan, would likely be lower. The Plan strategically prioritizes redevelopment to minimize displacement and establishes housing affordability requirements to secure additional committed affordable units and hopefully, stabilize market affordable units with the production of new housing supply in the area.

3. When will the draft Plan and Design Standards be released? When is the public hearing?

Both the draft Plan and Design Standards will be released in June followed by a public comment period. Planning Commission and City Council public hearings are tentatively scheduled for September. Information about the release of the draft Plan, the public comment period, how to share feedback, and future engagement opportunities will be communicated through eNews, WhatsApp, and shared with community groups. A project timeline can be found on the project webpage.

4. When and how does the Plan get implemented?

The Plan timeframe is 20 to 25 years. The Plan is implemented through Plan-identified public improvements carried out by the City, as well as new development constructed by private property owners. Development applications submitted for sites in the Plan area will go through a review and approval process that typically takes about 18-24 months, and includes review and input by City



staff, community members, Planning Commission, and City Council. The Plan will include an implementation chapter detailing tasks, responsibilities and anticipated timing for implementation. Department of Planning and Zoning staff track the implementation of the City's Small Area Plans, which you can find here: alexandriava.gov/planning-and-zoning/long-range-planning-processes-and-plans-in-active-implementation

5. Why don't we stop the planning process until we have the tools needed to protect residents?

The City does not have the legal means to prohibit development, so stopping this planning process will not stop development from happening. As a result, delaying the Plan will only mean that development will continue to come in but without any of the new requirements that the AlexWest plan would create.

6. What can Planning do – and what can't it do?

Planning can create a vision for a specific area and create a framework for providing quality of life elements, like access to amenities, safety while walking and biking, access to and the quality of public transit, parks and open space. Planning can also achieve housing affordability in exchange for density. Planning cannot: 1) alter the market/land economics (for instance, it can't change the fact that rents are going up), 2) override existing land use approvals, or 3) go beyond Virginia state limitations regarding affordable housing. For example, planning can't impose rent control or adopt inclusionary zoning without authority from the Virginia General Assembly.

7. Why can't the City require more deeply affordable housing as part of the AlexWest Plan?

The State of Virginia has placed limits on what cities like Alexandria (and counties and other municipalities) are able to require of developers. The City CAN require affordable housing as part of development, but only in exchange for bonus density, ie, density above that which existing zoning already allows. The Plan's required percentage of the "bonus" and the level of affordability was established based on market analysis of the maximum costs that development projects can absorb, while still having an economically viable project. If the requirements for affordable housing (in addition to all the other requirements of development such as open space, infrastructure, etc.) are too high, the projects will not be built. In AlexWest, development projects are required to provide 10% of the bonus as committed affordable housing units at 60% Area Median Income, or the future citywide policy, whichever is greater.

8. With increased development, how is the Plan addressing impacts to schools?

Staff from Alexandria City Public Schools (ACPS) and the City of Alexandria (City) regularly update our analysis of the number of students "generated" by different housing types in the City of Alexandria. Among other insights, the analysis sheds light on how many students can be expected to reside in new development projects approved by the City. For small area plans, ACPS and the City collaborate to review demographic and development forecasts and conduct a student generation analysis. Based on this analysis, we do not anticipate that the new development forecasted in AlexWest will require new school facilities. For more information about student generation rates,



and how the City and ACPS work together please visit alexandriava.gov/neighborhood-development/joint-city-acps-capital-planning-initiatives-and-implementation.

9. What are some of the underlying economics that impact development in this Plan area?

Market rents ultimately dictate what kinds of buildings will be built and what materials will be used to build them. Steel and concrete buildings, which are typically taller than 85 feet, are significantly more costly to build than wood frame buildings, and thus require higher rents to make a viable project. In AlexWest, market rents do not currently (and are not anticipated to in the near-mid term) support the cost of construction for steel and concrete high-rise buildings. We can expect that most developers in AlexWest will build wood frame buildings, which typically max out at 85 feet or about 8 stories.

10. Why are heights being changed for the John Adams and William Ramsay school sites?

The proposed height change is not to incentivize development but rather to bring the Small Area Plan heights into consistency with the Zoning Ordinance which allows heights up to 60 feet on public school sites. This change in the draft Building Heights map was shared with the community at the April 25 meeting and can be found on the [project webpage](#).

11. What does Floor Area Ratio (FAR) mean in the Plan recommendations?

FAR is a tool for regulating building mass or bulk on a development site. In addition to FAR, development must meet other requirements, such as building heights, setbacks (how close a building can be to the boundaries of a lot) and ground level open space, that would prevent the building from covering the entirety of the lot (getting 100% coverage). The AlexWest Plan allows FAR of 3.0 in the Focus Area to incentivize development in areas such as parking lots and underutilized commercial areas to minimize residential displacement. Area 2 has an FAR of 2.0, a lower FAR that hold less of an incentive for redevelopment.

Floor Area Ratio (FAR) is defined in the City’s Zoning Ordinance, and in simplified terms, generally means “the total floor area of a building (including all the floors if there are more than one) divided by the total area of the lot, tract, or tract of land it is built on.” The image below provides examples to help illustrate the concept.

FAR	0.25	0.5	1	1.5	2
COVERAGE					
25%					
50%	N/A				
100%	N/A	N/A			

12. When will the City implement rent control?

The City does not have the authority to institute rent control. The City’s powers are limited to those granted to it by the State of Virginia. The City has a voluntary rent increase cap policy and encourages property owners to adopt the policy. We recognize, however, that increases in rent, especially after the height of the pandemic, are resulting in high levels of housing cost burden on lower- and moderate-income renters. Expanding committed affordable housing options is one way in which housing cost burden can be addressed over the longer-term.

13. How do you define Affordable Housing?

Affordable housing is defined as rental or ownership housing costing no more than approximately 30% of a household’s gross monthly income before taxes. For more information on levels of affordability based on household income, please visit: alexandriava.gov/housing/housing-publications-reports-and-videos#HousingDefinitionsandTerminology

14. Will there be affordable units at or below 40% of the area median income (AMI) in AlexWest?

The Plan recommendations require Committed Affordable Units (CAUs) obtained through development in AlexWest to be at or below 60% AMI. The Office of Housing will work with property owners and developers to obtain more deeply affordable units through other means such as land dedication and public-private partnerships, as detailed in the Plan recommendations.

15. How do I report apartment property maintenance issues?

Please refer to [Renter Resources](#) page under “Report Apartment Maintenance Request.” You may also contact Alex311 at 311 or 703.746.4311.



16. What is the latest with the parallel road on Monday Properties?

The Plan’s draft Street Network map has a modified street network around 1900 N Beauregard and no longer shows a street connection between The Blake through 1900 N Beauregard. This was shared with the community at the March 4 and April 25 community meetings as part of the release of the draft recommendations and transportation updates.

17. What is the latest with the Seminary Road and N Beauregard Street intersection?

The previous plan proposed an intersection redesign called the Ellipse. A new design for this intersection will be explored and implemented in the future to address high traffic volumes, provide streetscape and safety measures that increase the comfort and visibility of pedestrians and bicyclists, and maintain ease of access for public transit and vehicles to pass through. The final design of this intersection will be consistent with current City policies and commitment to Vision Zero.

18. What is the latest with the West End Transitway?

The West End Transitway is one of three Bus Rapid Transit corridors planned for the City and is a separate process from Alexandria West. To learn the latest on the West End Transitway please visit alexandriava.gov/transit-planning/West-End-Transitway or the Alexandria West Planning project webpage under “Alexandria West Related Projects.”

19. What is the latest with the Holmes Run Trail repairs?

For project updates, please visit the [Holmes Run Trail Repairs](#) project page.

20. Does the Plan propose a connection across I-395 to Landmark Mall?

Staff have identified this as a potential desired connection and included a note on the Bicycle Network Map for a potential future connection over I-395 to the Landmark Mall site. Any future connection would require coordination from State and Federal agencies as well as grant funding for implementation.

21. How are office-residential conversion projects addressed in the Plan?

The Plan area has Class B and Class C office that is either underutilized or not being developed. This is happening not just in the City but across the region and country, reflecting dramatically reduced demand for office space. In response, many commercial building owners are converting their buildings to residential buildings. In some cases, commercial property owners have existing zoning that allows a conversion from office to residential if they don’t exceed the density requirement. If a parcel requires a rezoning, the City discusses what the impacts of development will be and how to address through community benefits contributions.



The City studied conversions as part of Zoning for Housing/Housing for All project. For more information, please visit the [Zoning for Housing](#) project webpage.

For the AlexWest Plan area, while there are not specific recommendations related to office-to-residential conversions, one of the benefits of these projects is the provision of net new housing stock that doesn't displace existing residents.

22. How is the City responding to development applications while the planning process is ongoing?

The Alexandria West planning process is intended to create an updated community vision for the future that proactively plans for change and prepares for challenges and opportunities in the years to come. As we undergo the planning processes, we are aware that landowners have the ability to submit redevelopment proposals. Because the AlexWest planning process is ongoing, we want to make the community aware of this and share information about the City's standard practices for development proposals received within an active plan update area.

- Development proposals are permitted to move forward in the development review process if they are substantially in compliance with their existing approvals and/or the existing Small Area Plans (SAP).
- If development proposals are anticipated to require one or more significant amendments to the existing SAP, those amendments will only be considered in the context of the small area planning process underway.

23. What are the boundaries of the Alexandria West Plan?

The Plan encompasses the area of the City generally west of I-395, with the exception of the area east of I-395 at Seminary Road.

24. How do I stay up to date on AlexWest updates?

You can [sign up for City eNews](#), under Planning and Zoning, select All Community Meetings and All General Information. You may also join the WhatsApp Group by messaging 571.358.7569 through WhatsApp messenger which is an App that can be downloaded from the App Store. Or you can contact Christian Brandt, Urban Planner, Department of Planning and Zoning at 703.746.3859 or Christian.Brandt@alexandriava.gov.

25. How can I provide feedback?

You can use the online community comment form on the project webpage at alexandriava.gov/AlexandriaWest, or you can call or email Christian Brandt, Urban Planner, at 703.746.3859, Christian.Brandt@alexandriava.gov. We're happy to talk and answer any questions anytime!