



Environmental Policy Commission

Honorable Mayor Wilson and Members of City Council
City Hall
301 King Street
Alexandria, VA 22314

August 6, 2024

Re: Sustainability Elements of Alexandria West Small Area Plan Update

Dear Mayor Wilson, Vice Mayor Jackson, Members of City Council, and Members of the Planning Commission:

At its June 2024 meeting, the Alexandria Environmental Policy Commission reviewed the draft Alexandria West Small Area Plan sustainability elements. The Commission moved to endorse the recommendations in the plan as consistent with the City's Environmental Action Plan.

The EPC commends the Alex West Small Area Plan update for its thorough consideration of recommendations and actions in line with the goals of the EAP. Sustainability features the EPC finds valuable in the AlexWest SAP include the following, and we recommend these strengths be applied across all future land use plan updates in the City:

- Reduced Greenhouse gas emissions and Increased energy efficiency
 - New bike, pedestrian, and street connections to increase multimodality – off-road and on-road bike paths, trails, as well as BRT stops
 - Compliance of new buildings to meet current Green Building Policy, resulting in lowered building emissions
 - Commitment to highest and best land uses by highlighting opportunity to increase building heights thus increasing density instead of encouraging sprawl
 - Encouragement to explore district-wide sustainability measures and approaches
- Increased Resilience
 - All stormwater management to be done onsite and not add to current capacity
 - Green infrastructure - increased tree coverage for shading, stormwater BMPs, preservation, with minimum open space development requirements for new development.
- Climate Equity
 - Redevelop surface parking lots with urban heat island effect, which disproportionately affects communities of color – to replace with new developments, which also reduces existing resident displacement
 - Commitment to housing affordability through affordable residential development targets, encouragement for developers to explore available strategies to maximize affordable options, authorization of bonus density incentives in the Focus Areas.
 - Equitable access to new and existing network of parks, including potential Winkler Preserve new pedestrian access points

While the EPC favorably recommends the Alexandria West Small Area Plan, the Commission would like to highlight opportunities to maximize the positive environmental impact, consistent with EAP targets, through the additional iterations and/or implementation of the plan, to include:

- Provide incentives or more clear targets to facilitate districtwide sustainability measures and approaches for the development of large property owners.



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- Eliminate or reduce parking minimums for new development near transit, especially for infill development projects on existing parking lots.
- Prioritize transportation options that reduce vehicle miles traveled, increases accessibility, and improves efficiency of multi-modal transit, to include dedicated bus lanes, separated bikes lanes, and pedestrian scale routes along key corridors (e.g., shopping centers, schools).
- Expand required/encouraged retail areas, as appropriate, to enable a live-work-play SAP that requires less vehicle miles traveled for residents conduct their daily activities.
- Encourage all surface parking lots to have solar panel canopies that reduce heat island effect and increase renewable energy generation
- Consider measurement and reduction of embodied carbon in building materials and infrastructure materials
- Encourage healthy building certifications for new buildings (e.g. WELL, Fitwel, RESET Air) to improve indoor air quality and overall occupant health
- Ensure existing and new development is built to withstand and recovery from the impact of future hazard events (to include heat wave, drought, and extreme weather events), by incentivizing and requiring where possible specific resilience measures, such as alternative energy capture and battery storage, encouraging development consistent with advanced or resilient building codes, on on-site stormwater management and capture, gray/black water systems in large scale developments, and other strategies to protect Alexandrians from future conditions.

Small Area Plan updates are a critical mechanism for the City to shape the built and natural environments for the next generation. The EPC recommends that the City of Alexandria ensure all Master Plan and Small Area Plan updates take bold actions to help meet or exceed targets identified in the EAP2040 and ECCAP. This SAP update also presents an opportunity to flag the prior EPC/Planning Commission recommendation from a joint letter in January of 2023, where we expressed our concerns for rapid and effective updates to development approval processes to meet Alexandria's 2019 Declaration of Climate Emergency commitments and Environmental Action Plan (EAP) 2040 targets. Particularly relevant is our recommendation regarding Master Plans and Small Area Plans:

The Master Plan and most Small Area Plans do not adequately address or include reference to community environmental goals/targets. Use the existing amendment process and current planning process such as the Alexandria West Small Area Plan and others to:

- A. Establish a mechanism by which EAP2040 GHG reduction targets and Climate Emergency Declaration commitments become binding on new development.*
- B. Require developers to submit an Action Plan for Carbon Neutral Buildings by 2030 and Carbon Neutral Sites by 2040 to achieve GHG emission targets and Climate Declaration commitments. The plans should consider funding available from the federal Inflation Reduction Act of 2022 and other funding streams.*

Further, the EPC recommends that all future Master Plan and SAP updates include:

- Building and Site Design that apply net zero requirements under the Green Building Policy, targets net-zero carbon emissions and all-electric buildings, reduces heat island impacts and maximizes tree canopy, emphasizes land use that prioritizes open space and pedestrian scale development, and integrates stormwater management best practices.
- Promotion or incentivization of reasonable on-site alternative energy production to include solar panels, geothermal, energy storage, grid-interactivity and demand response.



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- Transportation elements that prioritize multi-modal transit and electric vehicle infrastructure, to include dedicated bus lanes, protected bike lanes, on-site and neighborhood EV charging.
- Commitment to social equity to include maximizing contextual and allowable height and density bonuses to facilitate affordable housing availability

The Commission appreciates your consideration of its input on this project, and we look forward to the implementation of the Alexandria West Small Area Plan.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Marta Schantz', is written in a cursive style.

Marta Schantz
Chair, Alexandria Environmental Policy Commission

cc: Alexandria Environmental Policy Commission
City Manager James Parajon
Andra Schmitt
Melissa Atwood
Karl Mortiz
Ryan Freed