



City of Alexandria, Virginia

Planning Commission Annual Report

Fiscal Year 2024

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BACKGROUND:

The Planning Commission is appointed by City Council and performs its duties under Chapter 9 of the City Charter, Title 7 of the City Code, and Section 11-500 of the Zoning Ordinance. It is charged with adopting, reviewing, and amending the City's Master Plan, making final decisions on Subdivision and Site Plan regulatory cases, and making recommendations to City Council on other regulatory cases such as Zoning Text Amendments, Special Use Permits, Development Special Use Permits, Encroachments, and Vacation proposals.

In Fiscal Year 2024, The Planning Commission held 12 Public Hearings, including one on November 1, 2023, which was a Special Public Hearing on Zoning for Housing/Housing for All.

WORK SESSIONS:

The Planning Commission held several Work Sessions during FY 2024, including two Joint Work Sessions with the City Council on Zoning for Housing/Housing for All; one was held on June 26, 2023 (FY 2023) and one was held on September 5, 2023 (FY 2024). Also, a Planning Commission Work Session was held October 3, 2023 on Zoning for Housing/Housing for All. Further, a Planning Commission Work Session on AlexWest was held on January 4, 2024. A Planning Commission Work Session on the Sign Ordinance Update was held on April 4, 2024. Further information on these Work Sessions and the related matters is included in the following pages.

SUMMARY OF REGULATORY ACTIVITIES

Regulatory Cases	FY 2022	FY 2023	FY 2024
Public Hearing Special Use Permits (SUP)	19	37	27
Encroachments, Subdivisions and Vacations	15	8	7
Development Projects (DSP/DSUP)	22	18	17
Master Plan Amendments and Re-zonings	21	12	13
Zoning Text Amendments	12	9	7
Consolidated Development District (CDD) Conceptual Design Plans	5	2	2
City Charter Section 9.06	8	2	1
Transportation Management Plan Special Use Permits	11	10	1
Total	113	98	75
Administrative Approvals			
Administrative Special Use Permits (SUP)	35	40	33

Seventy-five (75) regulatory cases were considered by the Planning Commission in FY 2024, as shown in the table above. These cases were heard during 12 Public Hearings. The number of cases for FY 2022 and FY 2023 are included in the table above for comparison.

All regulatory cases were either recommended to City Council for approval or approved by the Planning Commission. Subdivisions and Site Plans are approved by the Planning Commission and do not require approval by the City Council. However, these cases are placed on the City Council Docket for informational purposes only.

FY 2024 Public Hearing case types stayed steady for the most part consistent with FY 2023. However, Public Hearing Special Use Permit declined approximately 25 percent. The reason for the decrease in FY 2024 may be tied to the fact that many Special Use Permits no longer require Public Hearings as their processes have been streamlined. Example changes include restaurant uses and home businesses no longer require Public Hearing Special Use Permits. Another reason for the drop in Special Use Permits may be a decrease in substandard lot redevelopment. The City was processing several Special Use Permits for substandard lots per year until interest rates increased. Additionally, as of September 1, 2023, the City made outdoor dining in the public right of way an administrative use.

The following pages provide examples of the case types recommended for approval by the Planning Commission in FY 2024. All FY 2024 Planning Commission Dockets, and Dockets prior to FY 2024, include Staff Reports and Presentations for all cases and can be found on the [City's Meeting Dockets and Video Webpage](#).

ZONING FOR HOUSING/HOUSING FOR ALL

The Planning Commission held three Work Sessions on Zoning for Housing/Housing for all in FY 2023 and FY 2024, with two of them held as Joint Work Sessions with the City Council. Following public input, data gathering and analysis, the Planning Commission recommended approval of the Initiative on November 1, 2023 and the City Council approved the Initiative on November 28, 2023. Three Public Hearings on Zoning for Housing/Housing for All occurred in November with approximately 300 speakers.

Information on the Zoning for Housing reforms and Housing for All, the equity component, can be found on its webpage at <https://www.alexandriava.gov/planning-and-zoning/zoning-for-housinghousing-for-all>



DEVELOPMENT CASES

Alexandria City High School—Minnie Howard Campus

The new Minnie Howard Campus completed the first phase of construction with a ribbon cutting ceremony in May 2024. The school building opened for academic year 2024-2025, providing over 300,000 square feet of education space designed for 1,600 students, a full size gymnasium, and 25-yard indoor pool for competitive swimming and diving as well as several co-located spaces such as a new Health Department Teen Wellness Center, and Department of Community and Human Services programming for families. In addition, the site features many community recreational facilities, including an artificial turf athletic field, outdoor tennis, basketball and pickleball courts, and a perimeter walking path at the rear of the site connecting the various recreational areas. The recreation facilities will begin construction as part of phase two, anticipated to be completed in the fall of 2025. The school is designed to meet LEED Gold and Net Zero standards, the first building in Alexandria designed to meet this high standard. Net Zero energy will be achieved through a combination of nearly three acres of photovoltaic panels and about two acres of geothermal wells for the heating and cooling system.

Address: 3701 W. Braddock Road



Approved: January 2022



View of new, competition length indoor pool

DEVELOPMENT CASES

Meridian 2250



Construction of the 26-story residential building known as Meridian 2250 at Eisenhower Station, located on the western portion of Block 20, was completed in July 2024. The 420 Unit residential development includes rooftop open space, and a half-acre, publicly accessible dog park on the southern portion of the development's site. Pedestrian streetscape improvements connect the dog park with the open space and pond improvements along Eisenhower Avenue completed with the adjacent Parc Meridian development.

The project, which received Planning Commission and City Council approval in December 2017, includes 15 on-site affordable units with an estimated value of approximately \$3 million. In addition to the on-site open spaces, the applicant agreed to contribute \$350,000 to area parks. Public art has been installed on the exterior walls of the above-grade parking garage. The building is a distinctive new addition to the Eisenhower East Town Center skyline.

Address: 2250 Mill Road
Approved: December 2017
Completed: June/July 2024

DEVELOPMENT CASES

WMATA Headquarters Building

Completed in October 2023, the building is approximately 400,000 square feet with 14 stories. This project is part of a regional effort by the Washington Metropolitan Area Transit Authority (WMATA) to consolidate offices to three headquarters in Maryland, Virginia, and the District of Columbia. For the Virginia headquarters, WMATA has chosen Alexandria, near the Eisenhower Avenue Metro Station. The building includes a roof top green space as well as a public art installation at the lobby level. This project continues to build momentum for the mixed use Eisenhower Town Center.

Address: 2401 Mill Road
Approved: July 2019



View of building from SE along Mill Road
(picture courtesy of JairLynch)



View of building from SW along Mill Road (picture courtesy of JairLynch)

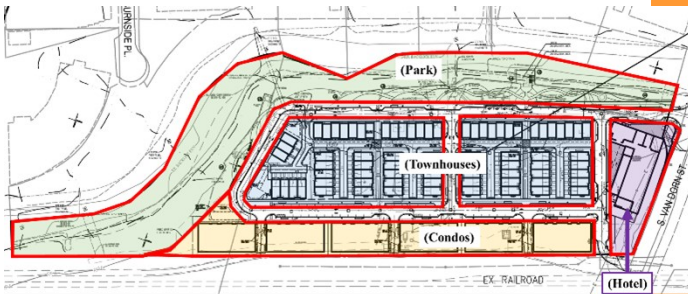


DEVELOPMENT CASES

Vulcan Redevelopment Site



Hotel (view from S. Van Dorn)



Site Plan showing the public park boundaries in green



Townhouses (facing new road D and public park)

In April 2024, the Planning Commission and City Council approved the 17.8 acre Vulcan Site Redevelopment to transform the brownfield site into a new neighborhood. While close to the Van Dorn Metro Station, the site posed challenges with access from S Van Dorn Street and environmental remediation from previous industrial use. The approved project overcame these challenges and will deliver a 256-room dual-branded hotel with ground floor retail, 14 townhouses and stacked townhouse “sticks” with 199 units, and 6 condominium buildings with 204 units. The development also includes a 6-acre protection area associated with Backlick Run.

The applicant will contribute about \$112,000 toward Capital Bikeshare, \$250,000 toward public art, \$2.6 million toward constructing Backlick Run Park, and \$3.5 million toward affordable housing. The contemporary buildings will all comply with the City’s 2019 Green Building Policy, with the National Green Building Standard’s Silver Certification pursued for the condo flats, townhouses, and stacked townhouses; and LEED Silver pursued for the hotel. The redevelopment advances several 2015 Eisenhower West Small Area Plan goals, including restoring Backlick Run, providing a new street network (with opportunities to connect further to S Pickett Street and to the Virginia Paving Company Site), and a range of housing types.

Address: 701 S Van Dorn St. and 698 Burnside Pl.

Approved: April 2024

DEVELOPMENT CASES

Tidelock Site Redevelopment

In January 2022, the Planning Commission and City Council approved the 1.38-acre Tidelock Site Redevelopment to transform a portion of the underutilized office development site (known as Transpotomac Plaza) into a mixed-use site with one rental multi-unit building, one condo building, and restaurant and arts and cultural use building which will be home to the Levine School of Music. The project includes 234 unites, 10 of which are affordable and 21,120 square feet of open space, with 6,212 square feet to be publicly accessible. In 2023, the applicant modified the restaurant and arts building to remove the second floor and rooftop deck, in consultation with the Urban Design Advisory Committee for Old Town North. The project is currently under construction.

The applicant's monetary contributions include about \$30,000 to Capital Bikeshare, \$9,000 to the Urban Forestry Fund, \$560,000 to the Old Town North Implementation fund, and \$200,000 to affordable housing. The contemporary buildings will all comply with the City's 2019 Green Building Policy, with LEED Silver certification for the entire site. The redevelopment advances several goals of the Old Town North Small Area Plan and Urban Design Standards and Guidelines, including the enhancement of the Old Town North Arts and Cultural District, providing a range of uses and housing options, and integration of historic interpretation.

Address: 1033, 1055, and 1111 N Fairfax Street

Approved: January 2022



View of entire site from east elevation



Site Plan



Site under construction, summer 2024

LAND USE SERVICES/ SPECIAL USE PERMITS

FY 2024 Special Use Permits strengthening Community Connections

Special Use Permit Approvals Strengthen Community Connections

In September 2023 the Planning Commission and City Council approved SUP #2023-00052 which enabled the Art League to relocate to the long-term vacant building at 800 Slaters Lane, ensuring that the revered art school and its exhibition space and community gathering area remained within the City. Almost 7,000 students a year of all ages and skill levels will continue taking classes in the 17 new studio spaces, focusing on drawing, painting, watercolor, fiber art, ceramics, sculpture, printmaking, photography, jewelry making, clay animation, silk screening, and stained glass at a location not far from its previous Montgomery Street space. As part of the Special Use Permit, important safety and aesthetic enhancements to the parking lot were also addressed.



Relocation of the Art League



Gustave Boulangerie and Brasserie's Community Recreation and Entertainment Venue



Expanding on support for community gathering spaces in the City, in June, 2024 the Planning Commission and City Council approved SUP #2024-00033 to allow outdoor dining and outdoor recreation and entertainment at Gustave Boulangerie and Brasserie, 2207 Mount Vernon Avenue. The Del Ray outdoor space has become popular with Alexandria neighborhood residents as it provides a family friendly and relaxing place to meet at the extensive dining, bocce ball court, and sandbox areas. The business operator may add an approved outdoor off-leash dog play area in the future.

LAND USE SERVICES/ SPECIAL USE PERMITS

SIGN ORDINANCE UPDATE

At the April 4 Planning Commission Public Hearing, the Planning Commission held a Work Session on potential updates to the City's Sign Ordinance. At the Work Session, staff established the main goals of the update which include improvements to organization, clarity, and consistency. Regulation of specific sign types were also discussed including those regulating digital signs, A-frames in the publish right-of-way, illuminated signs on buildings more than 35 feet high, pole signs, and painted wall signs/murals. Staff discussed potential policy directions for each of these sign types. The Planning Commission was generally open to regulating most of these sign types differently. Prior to the Work Session, staff held a virtual community meeting on April 1. The Planning Commission Work Session mirrored the community meeting's format. Attendees of the community meeting were divided on changing the regulations on A-frames and digital signs.

Staff intends to share draft language reflecting staff research and analysis with the Planning Commission and community input in fall 2024. The draft language will be available on the City website and the community will have an opportunity to provide comments. Staff also intends to hold a second community meeting in fall 2024. Given this timeframe, staff anticipates that the final Sign Ordinance Update would be considered by the December 2024 Planning Commission and City Council Public Hearings.



MEMBERSHIP & ATTENDANCE

There were no changes in the membership of the Planning Commission for FY 2024. Elections were held in March 2024; Chair Nathan Macek was re-elected as Chair and Vice Chair Melissa McMahon was re-elected as Vice Chair. All members attended at least 75 percent of the scheduled meetings in FY 2024.

Planning Commission appointments to other Commissions and Work Groups for FY 2024 are noted below. In FY 2025, Stephen Koenig will join the 2025 Superintendent's George Mason Elementary Modernization Advisory Team.

<u>2024 Group</u>	<u>Planning Commission Member</u>
Transportation Commission*	Melissa McMahon, Chair Jody Manor, Member
Waterfront Commission*	Nathan Macek*
Green Building Policy Advisory Group	Stephen Koenig
ARHA Redevelopment Work Group	Stephen Koenig
Eisenhower West/Landmark Van Dorn Implementation Advisory Group	Mindy Lyle (Chair)
Open Space Steering Committee	David Brown
Duke Street Transitway Advisory Group	Mindy Lyle

* Appointments subject to City Council Approval

MEMBERSHIP & ATTENDANCE

COMMISSION: Planning Commission
CHAIR: Nathan Macek

Public Hearing Meetings

Board Member	2023					2024						
	Sep 5	Oct 3	Nov 1	Nov 6	Dec 5	Jan 4	Feb 6	Mar 5	Apr 4	May 7	Jun 4	Jun 24
Nathan Macek, Chair	X	X	X	V	X	X	X	X	X	X	V	E
Melissa McMahon, Vice Chair	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X
Mindy Lyle	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X
David Brown	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X
Stephen Koenig	V	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X
Jody Manor	X	X	X	X late	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	V late
Vivian Ramirez	X	X	V	X	X	X	X	X	X late	X	X	X

***There were no Planning Commission Public Hearings in the months of July and August 2023.**

INDICATE: (X) PRESENT; (E) EXCUSED, (U) UNEXCUSED, (V) VIRTUAL
 LIST OF THOSE WHO DID NOT ATTEND 75% OF MEETINGS: NONE

Approved: 

Nathan Macek, Chair

OTHER

Planning Commission Information

The Planning Commission's process for elections to fill leadership positions, namely, Chair and Vice Chair, is specified in its By-laws and involves the election of officers on an annual basis in March. Elections this year are described in the summary of membership and attendance. As called for in the By-laws, it is the vote of the Planning Commission that determines changes in leadership. Membership changes can also affect changes in the Planning Commission's leadership.

Questions?

Please contact Planning & Zoning staff at 703.746.4666 or email the Planning Commission at PlanComm@alexandriava.gov.

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